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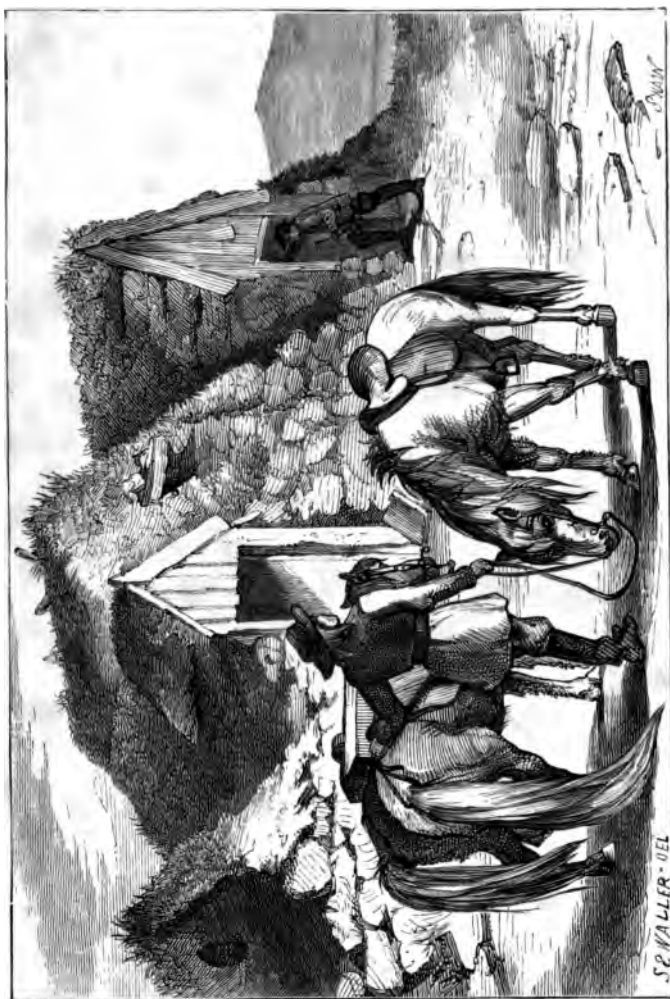
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SIX WEEKS
IN THE SADDLE









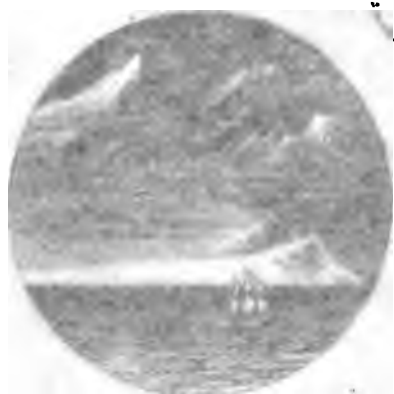
"HUNTING FOR QUARTERS."

1 Frontispiece.

SIX YEARS IN THE SADDLE

A

Man's Journal in Africa



LONDON:
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1871

203. f. 430.



SIX WEEKS IN THE SADDLE:

A

Painter's Journal in Iceland.

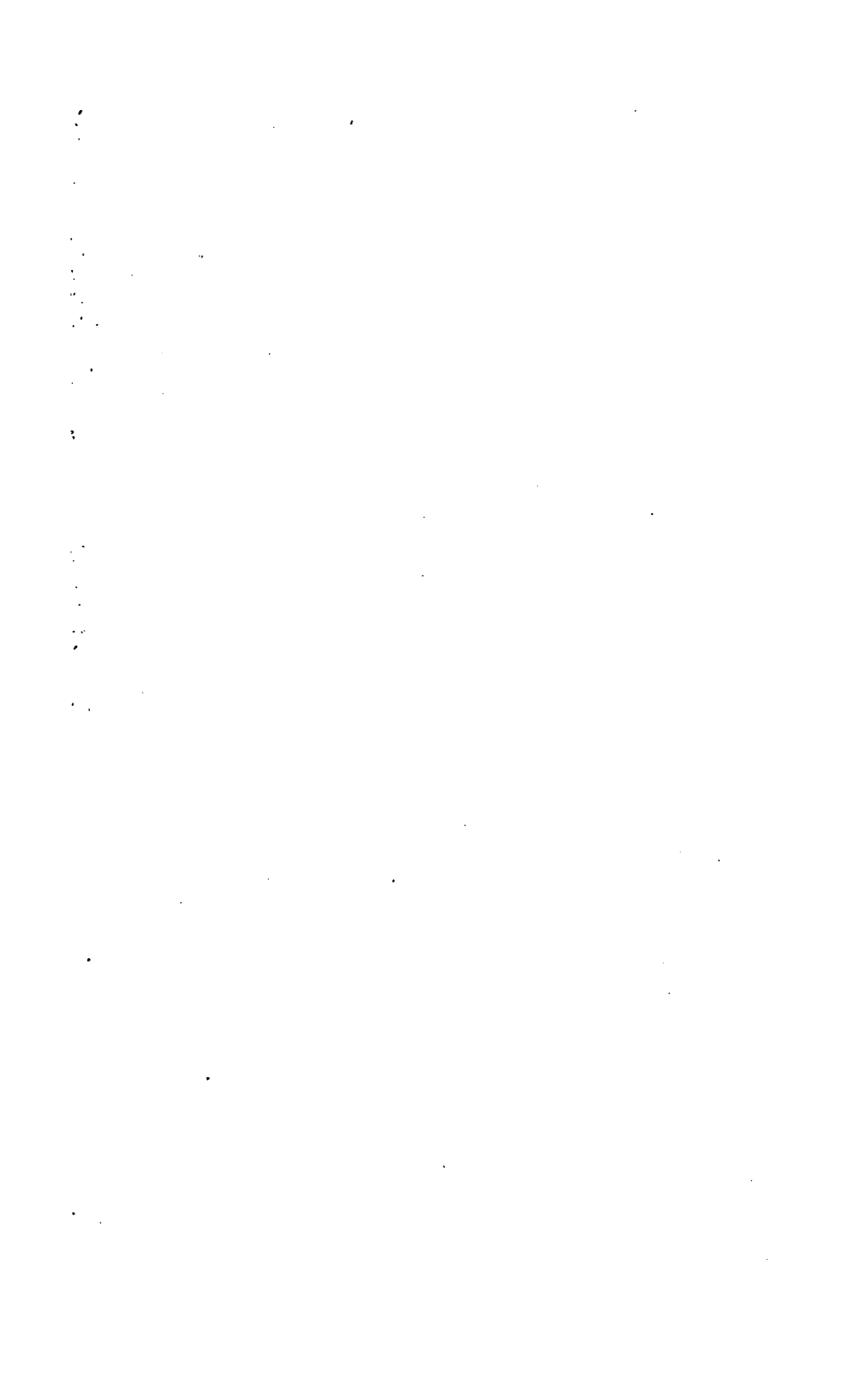
BY

S. E. WALLER.



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CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
EXPLANATION	1
“HOW WE GOT THERE”	20
FIRST WEEK	33
SECOND WEEK	57
THIRD WEEK	83
FOURTH WEEK	106
FIFTH WEEK	137
SIXTH WEEK	162

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

"HUNTING FOR QUARTERS"	<i>Frontispiece</i>
MAN WITH BOAT AND SEALS	<i>Facing p. 33</i>
"WAKE UP, SIR"	" <i>p. 56</i>
HERD OF PONIES CROSSING RIVER THJORSÁ	" <i>p. 71</i>
"MY DINNER"	" <i>p. 79</i>
FERRY BOAT CROSSING THE THJORSÁ	" <i>p. 82</i>
FALDR : OLD STYLE—PRIEST	" <i>p. 84</i>
HEAD DRESS—BRIDE	" <i>p. 90</i>
LADY'S SADDLE	" <i>p. 105</i>
HLIDARENDÉ	" <i>p. 112</i>
"VICTORY"	" <i>p. 119</i>
HORSES CROSSING THE THJORSÁ	" <i>p. 127</i>
OLD CHURCH AT STORI-NUPUR	" <i>p. 134</i>
HUNTING "SUDDEN DEATH"	" <i>p. 137</i>
ALMANNAGÍÁ	" <i>p. 170</i>



SIX WEEKS IN THE SADDLE:

A PAINTER'S JOURNAL IN ICELAND.

EXPLANATION.

It was "Burnt Njál" that was at the bottom of it. I had gone through Dr. Dasent's admirable version of the book with the very deepest interest, and was wild to visit the scene of such a tremendous tragedy.

The idea of the trip was on my mind for months before I could see my way towards its accomplishment. Travelling, you see, is rather an expensive luxury for a young man whose sole income is represented by a paint-brush.

I was totally unable to set about it in the orthodox manner, as I could not afford to buy a

quantity of horses, and supplies of preserved food for the journey. No; if I went, I must be an Icelfander for the time being, and do the best I could on the native accommodation. Some friends suggested that it would be an advantage to join a party; but I thought, on consideration, that I should do but little sketching in the society of men whose sole object was sport. So I determined to go alone; and I went.

As, perhaps, there may be a few readers who have not yet made acquaintance with "Burnt Njál," the truest and the greatest of all the Iceland sagas, I shall give here the merest skeleton of a few of the main facts and incidents, as any little interest this journal may possess, depends in great measure, upon them.

Iceland's day was an early one. She came to maturity with extraordinary rapidity, ran through some centuries of the brightest sunshine, and then died out into the twilight in which we find her

now. Her colonizers, instead of being the dregs of a redundant population, as is commonly the case with new countries, were the very pith and backbone of old Norway—men whose proud and independent spirit forbade them to put their necks under Harold Fair-hair's foot. They had heard of Iceland as the El Dorado of the hour, and left their native country in hundreds, with all their families and friends, to establish a freedom on the rugged shores of the new, strange land. By the middle of the tenth century, 50,000 souls had found a home, and laws and government became a matter of necessity. It was about this time that Njál, the hero of the saga, and the greatest lawyer the country ever produced, first saw the light.

He lived down south, at Bergthorsvöll, on the banks of the river Afall, with his wife, Bergthora, and three sons and three daughters; a man of peace among a population of vikings.

Twelve miles or so to the north-east, at Hlidarendé, dwelt the "Bayard of Iceland,"

Gunnar, a man in whom all the noblest qualities of our nature are said to have been united. He was forty years Njál's junior, and the old lawgiver and the young warrior were hand and glove. Unfortunately, Hallgerda, Gunnar's wife, a woman with the form and beauty of an angel and the mind of a fiend, the source of all the troubles and misfortunes of her husband's life, quarrelled with Bergthora ; and the unbroken truth and sincerity maintained between the two friends, amidst the murders, slanders, and ill deeds carried on between their households, is one of the most touching things ever handed down to us by tradition.

Hallgerda's early life had been a series of scandals. Twice a widow ere she was twenty, her (two first) husbands had been slain, if not at her instigation, at least with her knowledge and consent. Yet this was the woman, at five and thirty, that the peerless Gunnar, the man of unblemished reputation, was unable to resist when he returned from his travels in 974, although she was five years his senior.

Njál, celebrated for his foresight, did all he could to dissuade his friend from such a marriage, but to no purpose ; and all the evils that he prophesied would follow such a connection seem to have come to pass with extraordinary truth and regularity. Some petty question of precedence first stirred up Hallgerda's wrath, and she commenced her feud with Bergthora by egging on her servants to kill different members of her rival's household. Bergthora retaliated in the same way, and for upwards of five years the two husbands paid blood-fine after blood-fine, rather than take any steps that might tend to shake their friendship. But money could do but little to propitiate the relations of the slain, and jealousy and hatred began to spring up against the two noblest hearts in the land, solely on account of the wickedness of this one woman.

For some little time there had lived in Gunnar's house a man called Sigmund, and between him and Hallgerda a close friendship existed. On one occasion Gunnar overheard them

abusing several of his neighbours, and casting a great deal of ridicule upon Njál and his wife. Afterwards they called in some women who happened to be passing, and repeated their sarcasms in public. This enraged him, and he angrily declared that any one who dared to spread evil report of his friends should die. One of the listeners, who thought to curry favour with the other side, journeyed down to Bergthorsvholl, and acquainted Njál with the whole transaction. Neither he nor his wife troubled much about the matter, but his sons, led by Skarphedinn, the most excitable of them all, vowed immediate vengeance, and without wasting time in words, rode out at once to Hlidarendé, and slew Sigmund and one of his friends.

At this Hallgerda became mad with rage, and was casting about for some means to work her wicked will upon Njál's family, when a scarcity of food, almost approaching to a famine, threatened the country, and for a time diverted her thoughts into another channel. As she found she could get

but few provisions for money, she resolved to send one of her retainers to steal whatever he could lay his hands upon from the house of a man called Otkell, who lived not far distant.

Gunnar, at the sight of so much food brought suddenly into the house on the following day, showed some astonishment, and asked whence it had come, but received nothing but a spiteful answer from his wife. In the heat of the moment he struck her with his hand. She turned maliciously round upon him, saying, "That slap I'll bear in mind. Some day it shall be repaid."

The theft did not long remain undiscovered, and no one grieved over it more than Gunnar, who offered every reparation that lay in his power. But owing to the evil words of a secret enemy, who influenced Otkell to a great degree, no compensation would be accepted, and he was summoned before the Althing, or Parliament, then sitting at Thingvalla. However, as might have been expected, the suit terminated entirely to Gunnar's honour and profit, as every one saw, at

once, how completely he had been the victim of adverse circumstances. Otkell, urged on by the malicious Skamkell, determined not to let matters rest, and on the next occasion that he was in the neighbourhood of Hlidarendé, galloped his horse through Gunnar's cornfield, and, either by accident or intention, rode over him as he was absorbed in his work. Nothing was said of this at the time, Gunnar, in his simple way, being willing to let the matter pass. Not long afterwards a tale reached his ears to the effect that Otkell had said, "that he rode over Gunnar on his own ground, and that he shed tears, like a child." The next day one of the shepherds came to the farm in great haste, to say that eight armed men were riding down the river Markafjot, evidently bent upon mischief. Gunnar, throwing his battle-axe over his shoulder, set out at once, followed by his brother Kolskegg. The men proved to be Otkell and his companions, and a desperate fight took place between the two parties, which terminated in the death of all the conspirators. A suit for manslaughter was then

brought against Gunnar, which merely served to cover him with additional honour and popularity.

The following year he was induced to be present at a horsefight (a common amusement of the time), and when he discovered that foul play was intended against his fighting-horse, became indignant, and struck two men to the ground. This began a fresh feud, for Starkad, one of the injured men, after waiting some time for a favourable opportunity, assembled a band of thirty men under the Thryhirningr (a famous three-peaked mountain), and waylaid Gunnar and his two brothers as they returned from a feast held the previous day at Tunga.

Though almost surrounded by their numerous enemies, the little band made such an extraordinary resistance, that no less than fourteen of the assassins were destroyed, and the survivors fled, vowing that they had to do with "more than men."

To Gunnar's great grief, his brother Hjort was killed.

Again was another suit instituted against Gunnar, and again his enemies were overwhelmed with disgrace.

After this, things kept tolerably quiet for a time, but more and more mischief and destruction were gathering over this gallant heart.

Within four years, as he returned from a visit to the southern coast, the sons of Otkell and Starkad, in company with twenty-three others, set upon him and Kolskegg. The encounter that took place reads almost like a fairy-tale, for on this occasion, as on all the previous ones, the battle ended most disastrously for his enemies, and covered him with glory. But in the suit which followed, the awful bloodshed in which he seemed to be so constantly involved made it necessary to adopt strong measures, and though Gunnar's fame rose almost beyond that of mortal man, he was condemned by the judges to banishment for three years.

So he bade farewell to his wife and household, and one fatal morning, rode off down the river

Markafjot, to join the ship that was to bear him away from the land he loved so well. "Don't let me look back," he said to his brother Kolskegg, "lest my heart fail me." Suddenly his horse fell with him heavily, and as he rose up to remount, he found his eyes looking up the valley, instead of down. He saw the house, the farmyard, the corn-fields all white with harvest, and his heart almost burst within his breast. "I cannot go on," he said, and, wishing his brother "God speed," rode rapidly back.

For some months all was quiet, and Gunnar seems to have lived on unsuspectingly, unguardedly. But comfort and security he was never to know again. The brilliant day was closing in, there remained but for his sun to shed one parting flash of light.

One autumn evening there rode out along the road to Hlidarendé a great company of armed and lawless men, and as they pushed on towards their awful work, spoke of the best way of taking Gunnar by surprise. They knew that he had an

Irish hound called Samr, on whose courage and sagacity he placed the utmost trust, and how to avoid being discovered by this dog they seemed greatly at a loss to know. At last they bethought them of taking a farmer with them who knew the animal, in order to allay his suspicions. By these means Samr was lured out of the house, and quickly killed; but his last yell awoke Gunnar, who, taking up his bow and arrows, shot down man after man as they rushed up the slope to attack him. Crash!!! The bowstring broke, cut from behind. He turned to his wife,—

“Twist me a string with your hair, Hallgerda.”

“Does much depend upon it?” she said.

“My life.”

“You slapped my face once,” she answered, “now it’s my turn,” and ran out of the house.

The final scene then closed in. A last and desperate defence he made; foe after foe fell before his blows, till, exhausted with wounds, he sank to the ground, and his great spirit found peace at last.

Even his enemies were overcome with admiration ; some with remorse. They buried him under a cairn upon the hill-side, which stands there until this day, and his armour and bright clothes and golden ornaments they hid beneath a huge boulder of lava rock.

When the news spread abroad of Gunnar's death, there was great grief throughout all Iceland, and Skarphedinn vowed to wreak a terrible vengeance.

Even after death, says the old saga, Gunnar rested not in his stony chamber, but was heard to sing in the starlit night, urging on his friends to battle.

Skarphedinn slew many of the assassins, but Gunnar, being an outlaw, died unatoned. There was much noise and disturbance at the Althing. Every one knew and felt that the greatest man the country ever knew had been taken from them, and it was a long long time before anything like tranquillity was restored.

And now the whole character of the saga

alters for awhile, and all interest centres in the great fact that about this time (A.D. 997) Christianity began to be taught and received in Iceland.

But with the greater part of the rest of the work one has not so much sympathy. The whole interest and feeling are centred in Gunnar, and at his death we feel it almost time to close the book, though we have hardly glanced over one-half of it. But we must remember Njál, that great, good man, for was it not the closing scene in his gentle life that gave a name to this extraordinary story? So the manner of his death, and the circumstances connected with it, I will try to tell briefly, and then relate how I rode out and saw the places mentioned with my own eyes.

Two years after Gunnar's death, Njál's sons, Helgi and Grim, returned from Orkney, bringing with them their friend Kári, afterwards their brother-in-law, who played a most conspicuous part in the tragic portion of the story.

Now, says the saga, there was a man called

Thrain, who, although brave and honourable, had made himself many enemies, by taking under his protection an utterly worthless coward named Hrapp. Skarphedinn, in his hot, unmanageable temper, incensed for certain reasons against these two men, and hearing that they would return from a visit to the farm of Mark on a certain day, lay in wait with five men behind the Dímon, an isolated crag on the banks of the Markafjot. Thrain rode by, as was expected, in company with seven others, and before he was aware of the impending danger, Skarphedinn slew him on the ice.

The dead man had a son, Hauskuld, a boy of about eleven years of age. On him Njál took pity, and installed him in his house as his foster-child, and as years went on he seems to have become the light of the old man's eyes. Before he was twenty he married Hildigunna, and was made a priest by his foster-father.

Now about this time there was a good deal of jealousy between the followers of the old and

the new religions,—between the pagans and the Christians. For though the latter formed the bulk of the population, a few of the survivors of the former generation still held undimly to their ancient faith.

One of these men, Valgard, who had been excessively prosperous under the old state of affairs and had held certain lucrative offices in the heathen Church, was stirred up to vengeance against the Christians, particularly against the old lawgiver and his family. In the craftiest manner he urged on his son to spread slander and evil report amongst the different members of the family, particularly impressing upon Skarphedinn the necessity of killing Hauskuld, as he was meditating an attack upon him for the murder of his father, Thrain. After more than a year of artful persuasion, Skarphedinn and his brothers, followed by Kári and the tempter, rode to the young man's house, and killed him in his own cornfield. An attempt was made to settle the feud by law, but to no purpose, for the friends of neither party

would come to any terms, and Flosi, the uncle of Hildigunna, swore that matters should never end without some retribution.

So he assembled 120 men, and one night, towards the end of the summer, rode down to Bergthorsvholm, determined to have the lives of all Njál's sons.

The result is well known. The burners dismounted, and when they had hidden their horses by the river-bank, dragged the hay and peat-stacks round the house, and set fire to the whole dwelling. Njál was given the opportunity to escape, but said he preferred to die with his family, and lying down upon the bed with his wife and little child, drew an ox-hide over their faces, and never spoke again.

Helgi, who attempted to escape in a woman's dress, was immediately slain, and Skarphedinn, blocked in between the blazing timbers, was soon smothered in the fumes.

The only survivor of the entire household, numbering upwards of thirty members, was Kári,

who, dashing out upon the roof, got away under cover of the smoke to a little tarn, where he extinguished his burning clothes.

In the suit at law which followed this fearful deed, Njál's avengers, finding they could get but little satisfaction from the Althing, turned to their arms, and defeated the burners in a desperate fight at Thingvalla.

Soon afterwards Flosi and his companion were banished the country for different lengths of time, and this judgment seems to have given satisfaction to all but Kári. Remembering the death of his friend Skarphedinn he followed the outlaws, quietly and persistently, through many countries, in various disguises, and eventually killed fifteen of them, and with this his anger died away. He then set out for Rome to obtain absolution for his sins, whither Flosi had preceded him the previous year.

Flosi returned home in 1016.

Kári soon afterwards put to sea, being anxious to return to his native land. His voyage was

most prosperous until he sighted Iceland, when, in the midst of a fearful storm, he was thrown ashore utterly destitute. He wandered up the country until he found a dwelling, and, knocking, demanded the sacred rights of hospitality. A man opened the door. It was Flosi. And bitter enemies were thus reconciled. And so the old world story ends.

It was in consequence of reading Dr. Dasent's fine version of this saga that I set out for Iceland, and it was in consequence of the reality of the scenes I visited, and the impression made upon me by hearing the narrative over and over again from native mouths, that induced me to write the short description that follows.

MY JOURNAL,

KEPT FROM DAY TO DAY.

HOW WE GOT THERE.

May 31st, 1872.

EARLY on that morning the train ran me safely into Edinburgh. Though I had been jolted all night, and was excessively tired, I was obliged to push on at once to Granton, to inquire at the agent's office whether the Iceland boat had arrived.

This vessel, a Danish steamer, and originally, I believe, a gun-boat, makes six trips each year from Copenhagen to Reykjavik, touching at Leith on the way. Her name is the "Diana," and her only fault her diminutive size.

I was disappointed to find, on inquiry, that

she had not yet made her appearance, and that her arrival was very uncertain. Fortunately, however, I fell in with several fellow-travellers, who were in the same predicament as myself, waiting about with nothing particular to do, so we all repaired to the "Douglas," and settled ourselves comfortably to see what to-morrow might bring forth.

We had not long to wait, for during the afternoon we received a telegram announcing the vessel's safe arrival, and stating that she would sail at twelve o'clock the following morning.

Saturday, June 1st.

We rose early, and spent a considerable time in getting our luggage together, some of the party having so much that it was necessary to charter several cabs to convey them and their belongings down to Leith. We left the "Douglas" about half-past ten, managed to get comfortably settled on board before twelve, and soon afterwards we were off. In the afternoon I made the acquaint-

ance of an Iceland lady, to whom I had a letter of introduction, and was getting on capitally, listening to all she had to tell me about her native country, and the best way of seeing it comfortably, when the sea began to freshen, and I—well, the less said about me the better.

Sunday, June 2nd.

We all rose this morning sobered men. I don't think that there was a single passenger free from sea-sickness, and throughout the day the following brilliant dialogue was perpetually going on :—

Orthodox question, "How are you?"

Invariable answer, "Deuced bad."

The only circumstance that occurred to enliven the proceedings was a sight of "Fair Island," which lies somewhere about midway between Shetland and Orkney.

This island possesses great interest on account of certain woolwork, woven in Spanish and Moorish patterns, which forms a sort of staple product

of the tiny spot. It is stated on excellent authority that one of the ships forming part of the Spanish Armada was wrecked here, and that a few of the surviving sailors introduced their native art amongst the inhabitants. I can see no reason to question the truth of the story, for the patterns are undoubtedly not their own, and the destruction of many of the Spanish ships on the north coast of Britain is a matter of certainty.

Monday, June 3rd.

At about ten o'clock in the morning we found ourselves close to the Feröe Islands, and gladly anticipated a day on shore, but were doomed to disappointment. Hardly had we sighted land when, all in a moment, we were enveloped in a fog so dense and so hopeless that we had to give up all idea of making the harbour, and were forced to content ourselves with standing off all day and the same night. Of course we grumbled considerably, but there was no help for it, as it would have been madness to attempt a passage

through the islands in such weather. Towards evening we were delighted to find that the mist was clearing away, and by eight o'clock on the following morning the wonderful cliffs of Ferøe stood out clear and magnificent.

Tuesday, June 4th.

A most lovely morning. The deck of the ship was decidedly fashionable, as everybody had turned out to enjoy the scenery, which was most impressive. The bold, abrupt precipices, which rose clear out of the sea, many of them at least 800 feet in height; the stern wild character of the coast; the countless seabirds, and the general feeling of utter desolation, attracted every one. From some of the highest cliffs leapt down the mountain torrents, making one gigantic sweep into the sea, and as the clouds constantly swept across the face of the picture, hiding everything for some moments, and the sun, alternating with the storm, burst forth at intervals, throwing the whole scene into one mass of shimmering light, I

think we all felt amply rewarded for yesterday's delay.

At eleven o'clock we anchored off the capital, Thorshaven. The gun was fired, and soon afterwards the Governor of the Ferøe came on board, and the passengers and mails were put ashore.

Within half an hour the ship was surrounded by little boats, the owners of which were very anxious to turn an honest penny by taking us across to the town, and one man astonished me greatly by calling out—

“Hullo, Governor!” He had been ten years in Australia, he told us, and spoke capital English.

We engaged him for the day, and soon found ourselves in Thorshaven, a place which would have been most interesting but for the dreadful smell of fish.

On every square yard of ground, on every available spot, scores upon scores of cods are split open and put to dry.

There are no streets, but a series of winding alleys twisting in and out amongst the wooden


houses, thatched with growing turf (the greenest thing in the place). Not a symptom of a tree, though a few shrubs and saplings may be seen in some of the private gardens. The queer brown dress of the inhabitants, their legs bandaged with thongs, after the fashion of the old Norskmen, their sheep or calfskin mocassins, and the little woollen nightcaps jauntily set above their sallow countenances, all added a feeling of novelty to the scene, and the size of their imposing city (about as large as a little English village) made one feel inclined to smile.

Denmark, I suppose, makes something by these islands as a fishing station, but I should not be disposed to call them a very flourishing colony.

When we had made all arrangements we started off to walk to Kirkubõe, to see an extraordinary old church that we had heard a good deal about, and for three mortal hours climbed, panted, and struggled over a series of hills, rocks, and bogs, ending with a precipice down which we had to crawl. The scenery inland was quite as fine as

the coast, though more desolate and weird. Hill upon hill ; mountains piled upon precipices ; long, almost endless valleys, filled with huge blocks of cold grey stone. No sound heard but the wild birds lamenting. It seemed like a giant's home. The only thing we met with that showed any feeling of life was an old black raven sitting on the skeleton of a sheep.

When we reached the church, we were a good deal surprised to find the ruins of a very quaint specimen of early English work. Even in its utterly dilapidated condition it is by far the most advanced building in the islands in point of architectural pretensions. I should have liked to have made a complete sketch of it, but we were so pressed for time that I had to give up all idea of doing so. Of its history I am completely ignorant. When we had finished our examination we adjourned to the neighbouring farm, in order to refresh the inner man. It was a pretty little timber hut, built of Norway pine, and literally buried in the green grass that grew all over it. The sitting-



room was clean and neat, and several coarse Danish prints adorned the walls. The whole place, in fact, showed an amount of comfort that we were quite unprepared for. The master of the house was most kind and hospitable. He entertained us on smoked mutton, milk, an extraordinary kind of omelette, coffee, and schnapps. Although *in manner* a most genial host, strange to say, during the whole time he never uttered a word. A sort of quiet melancholy seemed to pervade his mind which we could not account for. However, one of our party, who spoke a little Danish, had a private conversation with his wife, which he afterwards retailed to us, and we were given to understand that though an excellent husband and a much-respected man, he had one little weakness—brandy—and that, after drinking steadily for a fortnight or so, he completely lost the faculty of talking, though otherwise as sensible as ever.

“Yes,” his wife said, “he was merely unable to enter into conversation, that was all.”

The riddle was solved, the quiet melancholy accounted for—our friend the farmer was speechlessly drunk!!!

When our meal was ended, we made our way slowly back to the ship, and having procured lines and bait, attempted to catch some cods; our success, however, was not remarkable, as all the fish were very small.

In the evening we had a tender farewell with one of our fellow-voyagers, who intended spending a short time in the islands, and as we were to sail early on the following morning, we shed our tears the night before.

He was a young naturalist in quest of sea-birds, and moreover a thoroughly good fellow—at least I thought so, and much regretted when he left us at Thorshaven.

On the following morning we bade farewell to Feröe, and sailed away for Berufjördr, on the east coast of Iceland. The day was magnificent, and our winding course, in and out, amongst the islands, very fine. But unfortunately our hopes of a

fair passage were soon rudely dispelled, for though up to the time when we turned in for the night everything looked most promising, before three o'clock on Thursday the sea had changed its mind, and we began to toss and roll in the most uncomfortable manner. We were soon off our course, steam and sail both brought to bear to keep the ship steady, and for hour after hour things got worse and worse; all day, all night, and all the next day and night, we did not make half a mile, and for eight-and-forty hours there was no symptoms of a change. I never passed a more disagreeable time, as every one was completely silenced, and almost every one had a return of their sea sickness.

We were exceedingly glad, therefore, when we awoke on Saturday morning, to find the weather all that could be desired, and as our captain was three days behind time, he determined to touch at Berufjördr on his return, and sail straight to the Westmann Islands, and afterwards to Reykjavik.

Towards noon we had a beautiful view of

Portland, on the south coast of Iceland, and I certainly shall never forget the grandeur of some of the gigantic ice-mountains, as they swept down out of the clouds sheer into the sea. Every one was of course on deck, and opera glasses and telescopes were in great demand.


At about half-past twelve at night we ran into the Westmann Islands; although the hour was late, it was almost as light as day, excepting for the thin veil of green sheen that hung over their rugged shores. So precipitous are the cliffs, that we managed to get close up to land, and could see the one or two little houses and stores that lay perched up on the bank above. The gun was fired, and soon afterwards a boat appeared for the passengers and mails. There was *one* of the former and *two* letters.

These islands, called Westmann, from their having been the harbour of refuge of some Irish criminals many hundred years ago, are certainly most weird and imposing when seen at night—they lose in the full light of day. The fact, too,

of the outcast Scandinavian wizards having fled there to escape the black death which ravaged Iceland in the fifteenth century, lends a charm they would not otherwise possess. They seem so utterly desolate as they stand up gauntly out of the sea.

Though but twelve miles from the coast of Iceland, communication with them is most difficult, as the passage to and from the mainland is made in tiny boats (the only kind of vessel obtainable), and the sea in most cases is extremely dangerous. Sometimes, indeed, the inhabitants exist for months without a vestige of news from the outer world.

When we had seen the last of the solitary passenger (we put him ashore on that barren rock with much the same feelings as we should have put him into his coffin) we sailed away for Reykjavik.





FIRST WEEK.

EARLY on Sunday morning we had our first view of the capital of Iceland, but I cannot say that there was anything attractive in the small conglomeration of tiny wooden houses that lay huddled up on the low, bleak shore in front of us. When the baggage had been rescued from the hold, we were put ashore in little boats, and landed on one of the small, black timber piers used alike for passengers and mer-

chandize. Just about this time the beauty and fashion of Reykjavik came pouring out of church, and we had ample opportunity for inspecting any peculiarities of dress and appearance. Many of the Iceland ladies wore bonnets and carried parasols of Danish or English manufacture, but the generality had nothing on their heads but the little black woollen cap with the silver ornament and long silk tassel used alike by rich and poor, in-doors and out. The fashionable colour was black, although there were a few exceptions. The men were all dressed in dark clothes, and almost all had round felt hats, which they removed about every third minute with a graceful bow, in honour of our arrival. My companions then went off in a great hurry to hunt for lodgings, which they obtained after some little trouble. I was exceedingly fortunate, as I shared some rooms at the house of a widow, in company with three gentlemen who had come from Scotland some days previously in a trader.

Reykjavik has been so often described, that it would be useless to say much about it. The tiny

streets, running at right angles to each other ; the small black or white wooden houses, generally but one story high ; the open drains ; the utter absence of trees and foliage ; and the powerful smells ;—all tend to make one feel disappointed. There is none of the age and mystery about the dwellings that seems to hang over the inhabitants. One looks upon the men as the last relics of a powerful people ;—the descendants of the very pith of ancient Norway, and in great measure the colonizers of the world ; a people whose literature during the darker ages stood first in Europe, and even yet holds a very excellent place. Their little town, on the contrary, can give but one idea, namely, that of a wooden fishing village. It is true there are some large stores, a big Latin school, and a cathedral ; but all are alike modern and utterly deficient in architectural beauty.

When I had arranged my little chamber, I took my letter of introduction to Dr. Hjaltalin (the head physician to the island), and received a very hearty welcome and much good advice.

On the Monday morning I secured my guide, "Bjarni Finnbogason," at two rigs-dalers per diem, and food, or for the benefit of the uninitiated, I will say 4s. 6d. a day, as a daler is 2s. 3d. and a mark 4½d. Horses I found were dreadfully dear. British merchants had been buying to such an extent that the prices were more than double what they had been some months since. I went down to purchase, backed up by the faithful "Blarney," as one gentleman facetiously styled him, and commenced operations by refusing to give six pounds for an old brown, whose hips were nearly through his skin. I had been told before leaving England that really good ponies were to be had at four pounds a-piece, so acting upon this information I attempted to beat down the prices, but failed utterly. Everywhere it was the same: nothing respectable under seven or eight pounds.

Some of my countrymen took a lot of fine-looking animals to try, went out on the common, and galloped round in great style, but on hearing there was nothing under eight pounds they dis-

mounted, disgusted. I was getting very much put out myself,—affairs looked very hopeless,—when I saw a small boy on a beautiful chestnut coming down the street.


I went for it at once, and after a little hesitation agreed to give eighty rigs-dalers for him. It was a long price, but I thought I might as well have a really good animal for my own riding. I could not, of course, tell how he would turn out, but I almost flattered myself that I had secured one of the best mounts in the market,—an opinion splendidly confirmed in the next two months.

About an hour afterwards I managed to get a strong white horse for my servant's riding, and a piebald to carry the baggage. I then took my stud to the blacksmith and had them re-shod, bought travelling boxes, &c., and fitted myself out regularly for a career.

When I reached home, soon afterwards, and had said something about my purchases, one of my English acquaintances, who was reading at the table, looked up suddenly and exclaimed, "What,

you have been buying, Sir, actually buying your animals; and not only that, but have been even fool enough to pay for them! Now I have just been reading in this History of Iceland (he tapped the book he held in his hand) that no piracies have been perpetrated on these shores for upwards of a hundred and fifty years,—a hundred and fifty years I say,—and it is my firm conviction that it is high time this state of things should cease. *This is evidently the hour, and I feel very much like the man.* Yes, ah yes, I shall, now I think of it, certainly steal my horses.” Of course we all laughed considerably.

In the evening my servant and I worked hard at our preparations, so that we might be enabled to start early on Tuesday morning. I had heard so much of the utter indifference of the Icelanders to punctuality that I impressed the fact of “being up to time” very strongly upon Bjarni. He certainly learnt his lesson well, for by the appointed hour, not only was every necessary procured, but my boxes had been packed in the most scientific manner.



On the morning of Tuesday I took a farewell breakfast with Madame Hjaltalin, and with the best wishes of my countrymen I started.

Bjarni rode first on "Murder" (the white), the baggage followed on "Sudden Death" (the piebald), and I came last on "Battle;" and we careered out of the town amidst the most impressive hand-shaking of J—'s party and the sincere admiration of several small boys.

I must say that my enjoyment of the long ride to Krísuvík was very great. The wild, impressive scenery, the lakes, the precipices, and the lava fields suggested so much. Everything seemed so weird and so ancient, and yet so new to me. Without a symptom of a tree or shrub, the rolling downs, covered with half-withered grass, stretched away for miles, varied with bogs and quickmoss; whilst in the far distance stood out range above range of rugged hills enveloped in a deep blue haze. Every now and then we came across great lava fields, and here the riding was very rough. It had a most curious appearance, having evidently

burst upon the country like water, and had cracked and cooled in most extraordinary shapes.

Such a piece of desolation I have seldom seen. The only living things we saw being ptarmigan, plovers, and ravens. The latter were very plentiful. I saw no less than eleven sitting together on a single boulder.

Though entirely alone (excepting for Bjarni's company), I never felt so thoroughly comfortable in my life. There was something gratifying in being the sole proprietor of such a cavalcade, and being bound on such an errand as painting an unknown country ; and again, the "happy-go-lucky" air which pervaded the whole scheme, the delightful uncertainty about beds, meals, fires, and all home comforts, had a great deal of attraction for a Bohemian like myself.

After seven hours' riding we reached our destination without any particular difficulty, excepting the extraordinary nuisance that "Sudden Death" proved to us. He was originally led by Bjarni with a long cord, but he hung back so

persistently, that my guide was nearly dragged from the saddle, and his arm grew quite stiff with constant pulling. To mend matters we turned the brute loose down into a sort of cinder valley, made by the craters of a series of small extinct volcanoes, and, pulling out our long-thonged whips, set to work to hunt him, and, riding after him yelling and screaming, got him over five or six miles of ground in no time. Just as we were congratulating ourselves on the success of our plan we entered on a large rugged plain filled with immense pillars of lava, and the unhappy beast, charging into the middle of a large clump of them to escape the whips of his pursuers, was stopped with a fearful concussion, both the travelling boxes having stuck in the jutting boulders. I suppose he thought the passage wide enough for himself, and had forgotten the load on each side of him. It was no good urging him on, he could not go. The only way was to ride in front and whip him back. This interesting performance was repeated at least a dozen times in as many

miles, to the immense improvement of my luggage.

Krísuvík, which stands on a little eminence in the middle of a desolate valley on the southwest coast, consists of an old broken-down hovel and a decayed timber church of Lilliputian proportions.

The owner of this flourishing town was very loth to allow our horses pasture, as grass was very scarce in the neighbourhood, and it was not till after a long argument that I managed to secure a small spot about a mile off, which held a little withered couch. When the animals were hobbled, Bjarni and I went back to the church to our supper, and, prepared as I was for hard fare, the strength and quality of the feast were even beyond my expectation—rancid butter, bread that we smashed with the utmost difficulty with a hatchet, and salt fish—such salt fish, why, it was all salt and skin. However, we got through some of it somehow, and, making up with the milk which was fortunately very good, managed pretty


well. As I felt very tired, I soon began looking about for a resting-place, and finding some fleeces in the corner, lay down. In a few minutes, however, a little woman came running in, dragging a coarse mattress after her. For this I was most thankful, but, unfortunately, it was of peculiar shape, completely filling the space between the altar rails and the wall, and yet so small, that one was its full complement. So I reposed in comparative luxury, rolled in my plaid, whilst poor Bjarni had to content himself with the hard boards, and my legs for a pillow.

When we awoke on Wednesday morning, it was with some slight feeling of stiffness, which we forgot; however, when we viewed the remains of last night's meal, which had to do duty for breakfast. We requisitioned an old deal box for a table, a piece of unwonted luxury, and attacked the salt fish with unabated vigour.

When the horses had been caught, we rode up the valley to the sulphur mountains, for which the place is famous. The long range of fantastic hills,

though by no means picturesque, are well worth seeing. Not a blade of grass grows upon them, everything like vegetation ceasing as you ascend out of the valley. From cleft after cleft in the rocks jets of steam are constantly issuing, and streams of hot sulphur slide greasily down the barren hillsides. Towards the south are two very curious lakes, sisters, they lie side by side : Gestravatn (Guest Water) and Gröenavatn (Green Water). The first is of a cold grey tone ; the second, though only two hundred yards distant, is the most beautiful emerald green I ever saw. I cannot account for the difference. Gestr-a-vatn is good drinking water, the green lake is very disagreeable to the taste.

When we reached the first of the sulphur wells I sat down to sketch, and when unpacking my paint-box (which I had not done since I left England) discovered, to my horror and disgust, that the prussian blue had in some mysterious way exploded, and had swamped everything. My new tubes, my brushes, my dipper—all, all of



them were reeking with clotted lumps of this accursed colour. With all care possible I attempted to clean each thing separately, but after an hour of washing and wiping, scrubbing and sighing, I found it all of very little use. What I took off one thing seemed imperceptibly to get on to something else. The stuff oozed out of and into everything near it; it oozed into me: to such an extent that I can never forget it. My clothes, as long as they exist, will bear witness to the statement, and so much of it was smeared in my hair and ears, that I firmly believe it went into my system, for I know that for more than a week after my normal colour was "prussian blue."

After making a desperate attempt to complete my sketch, we rode back to the church and feasted on Australian meat and whiskey and water; what a dinner that was and how we did enjoy it! I had been out but three days, and the first of my two tins of meat broken into—an awful thing to reflect upon. In the afternoon went out again, and after painting hard for some hours,

returned quite tired out. Again the fish formed our evening's amusement, and again our bones made the close acquaintance of the hard boards. I resumed operations in the morning, though feeling very tired after the hard work of the previous day, and was tolerably successful with the big sulphur spring, making a fair sketch. The situation was, to say the least of it, novel, surrounded as I was by the lofty crags enveloped in steam, and sitting on a boulder of rock heated to such a degree that I was obliged to get up every few minutes to avoid scorching.

In the afternoon we determined to ride on a few miles to Herthisarvik. The order was given to march ; Bjarni paid the hostess and packed the boxes, and off we went. Our journey was not more than three hours long ; the scenery was very flat and uninteresting, as we were getting close down to the southern coast, which for a hundred miles or so is rather tame.

At about six o'clock in the evening we reached the farm, quite a nice little cottage for Iceland.

The owner received us most hospitably, and coffee and fresh fish were eagerly offered and accepted.

The room we sat in had four beds in it, a sanded floor, and one little window. The roof was very low, as I know to my cost, as my head was well bumped against the rafters on more than one occasion. There was another room adjoining the first, reserved for the cooking, and generally occupied by the ladies of the family. The whole place was but one story high, and was entered by a long low passage, perfectly dark, and built of turf and lava blocks.

We lay on the bed and eat our supper. A real bed, how nice it was to sleep in, and how we enjoyed washing in the morning.

In speaking of eating in bed, I should mention that in the houses up the country, I have frequently pulled a cod's head and a handful of fragments from under the quilt, some gentleman having dined comfortably about an hour before, and forgotten to remove the *débris*. It did not matter much as I seldom undressed at night, re-

serving my ablutions for the hot springs we saw almost every day.

A rather amusing incident occurred during the night. The bed I slept in, though exceedingly comfortable in itself, was at the far end of the little chamber tenanted by all the male members of the family, and towards midnight, I was rather naturally aroused by an intense feeling of suffocation, owing to the presence of so many large men in such a little air-tight box. I remonstrated, and our host with the utmost good-nature, jumped out of bed, exclaiming, "I understand," and going up to one of the timbers, which formed part of the support of the wall, pulled out a cork from one of the knots—he held it in his hand for about the space of half a minute, during which time, I should think, about six cubic inches of fresh air had come in; and then shuddering horribly, he pulled a wry face, said we should catch our deaths of cold, hammered the cork in tight, and jumped back into bed.

I rose early the following morning, and on

going out of doors to look after my stud, was met by my baggage horse, on whose back I discovered a terrible raw, owing to the pressure of the pack saddle. I was considerably disconcerted at the size of the wound, and knowing at the same time that each day's journey would only increase it, began to think there was some truth in the tales that had been dinned into my ears in Reykjavik. The dealers there had striven hard to impress upon me that the horses were so liable to sore backs that it was impossible to travel without spare ones, so that one might relieve the others, adding at the same time, that no man with his guide and baggage had ever crossed Iceland with less than six. I was aware, too, that nearly all the horses used by the natives for anything like rough work had setons in their breasts, in order to keep inflammation from their backs, thus showing how subject they are to it. Had I taken the advice of the dealers, I should have hired horses at a certain sum daily, the owner to take all risks, and engaging to provide me with a fresh one for

each animal that broke down. They told me that it would be far the cheapest, as the horses never lasted long ; in fact, that some casualty was sure to occur. On calculation, however, I discovered that, barring accident, and supposing I was fortunate in disposing of my animals at the end of my trip, I could save money by buying. "Why," thought I to myself, "should there be any accident, if I take care ?"

I had been told, too, that owing to the scarcity of grass and the hard usage, I should be very fortunate if I got anything like half price for my horses on my return, as they would sure to be in a wretched state. As I have related previously, I had bought, in preference to hiring, and as subsequent events proved, my ideas of the economy of the transaction were quite correct, for I saved more than seven pounds. Shoeing was the greatest expense my horses put me to, as during six weeks they were shod all round nine times.

There was no help for "Sudden Death," however, as we were obliged to push on our journey.

We dressed his back as well as we could, and after a light breakfast of fresh fish, bade the farmer good-bye and started off for Arnar-bœli (Eagle's-nest). We left Herthisarvik at ten o'clock, and rode hard for three hours, when we stopped to sleep and let the horses rest. The scenery was flat and dreary towards the coast, but bold and rugged on the land side. The great curse of the journey was the bogs. They seemed to pervade the whole district. When we had remounted, we pushed on at a good pace until we came to a series of seven small salt lakes. It had been thoroughly disagreeable for six miles previously—nothing but bogs and quickmoss, but when we went into the water it was unutterably nasty. We had to wade and swim, getting from bank to bank. "Sudden Death" was of course in all his glory, falling about in the most hideous manner and thoroughly saturating all the baggage. To see your pack-horse calmly seat himself in four feet of water and hear the sea pouring in gallons into your travelling boxes, is not calculated to enliven even a good-

tempered man. I am afraid my language on that occasion showed more fluency than elegance.

What a strange thing it is, that after swimming a river the result should always be the same. I have compared notes with many travellers, and all adhere to the same statement, and all express intense astonishment at one peculiar feature. It is easy to understand that locks will rust and become useless, that boxes will swell and refuse to be opened, that the whole contents should be amalgamated into one stupendous poultice, but *why should the bread always float down into the boots?* This is a question that has never been satisfactorily answered, and I certainly think it would be too much for any ordinary man.

As we approached the river Olvis-á, on the banks of which Arnar-boeli lies, we came across a good many wild swans and ducks. They seemed to care but little for us as long as we continued on horseback, but when we attempted to stalk them they flew away directly.

The farmhouse we were riding for soon loomed

in sight. It was but a little cottage, surrounded by a few small hovels. I had a letter of introduction to the owner, the Rev. Mr. Jonson, which I was anxious to present as soon as possible. As we rode into the yard I saw two men skinning seals, quite a strange sight to me. The priest having received my letter, gave me a most hearty reception and led the way into his little sitting-room, where I was introduced to his wife and daughters. He had truly killed, at any rate cooked, the fatted calf for us, for we had a leg of it for dinner. It was about as big as a very small joint of English lamb.

When our meal was over I strolled out upon the neighbouring hill, and was gratified by my first view of Hekla, backed up by the glaciers in the extreme distance. The country looked fine and bold. Grassy downs, choked with lava boulders, and long districts of arid black sand, here and there rugged crags jutted upwards to the sky, the whole enveloped in that peculiar mystery which pervades an Iceland night in midsummer. I looked

at my watch, it was eleven, and yet I could see the snow-peaks more than sixty miles away.

As I felt very tired, I soon found my way back to the house, and within ten minutes was exquisitely comfortable in the softest and cleanest of little beds.

I slept beautifully, but little did I foresee the manner of my waking. It is always the custom, both in this country and in Denmark, to have coffee before getting up in the morning ; but there was nothing peculiar in the circumstances wherein it was presented until on this occasion, when it was shrouded in a halo of romance. I was dreaming away (like anything), when I was touched upon the cheek, and looking up beheld a young lady—and a very pretty one, too—bearing coffee, biscuits, &c., and smiling a sweet good morning.

After we had breakfasted I took my sketching materials out on the hill and made some small studies of Iceland houses, and spent the remainder of the day taking notes about all connected with the seal fishery.

And now, in this place, it may be perhaps as well to apologize to the reader for my constant and recurring account of various meals eaten on their respective days, and for a certain gloating interest I have shown in the same. But when one looks back upon the discomforts of a week at sea, during the early days of which I could eat nothing, owing to sickness, and not much in the latter, owing to the greasy Danish cookery ; that washing was impossible (to any extent) ; that sleeping was a delusion and a snare, for never, in all my life, did I take seven hours of such tremendous exercise as on those stormy nights when I tossed about my berth like a pea in a thimble. Again, the two days spent in Reykjavik are impressed upon my mind almost solely by the numerous things I could not eat and the state of discontent I was in at the time, and since then, riding for so many hours day by day, sleeping in sheds on the hard boards without undressing, living on fare of such a description as I would undertake to say would be rejected by the commonest paupers in England

(by the bye, I have since heard that they refuse the Australian meat); all this, combined with the thousand and one nameless discomforts inseparable from such a vagabond life as mine has been, makes the advent of a respectable meal, a clean bed, and a little homely kindness, very very touching indeed.



SECOND WEEK.

Sunday, June 16th.

THIS day is (as all the world knows) a very memorable one, being the anniversary of my birthday.

Mr. Jonson officiates at two churches when occasion requires, which is not remarkably often. He called for his pony about ten o'clock, and rode away to Reykir to a christening, and I proceeded to make a small sketch of Miss Jonson, who kindly gave me a short sitting. I am quite aware that many will think that work on Sunday is, to say the least of it, misplaced, but it must be remembered that I had not a single book of any kind to read, and my knowledge of the language was (at that time) so imperfect that I could not carry on a conversation, so I was literally obliged to take refuge in my painting, as I had no other means of passing the time.

On the previous day they had been very anxious to catch some seals for me to sketch, and towards the middle of the afternoon four large ones were brought home from the river to my huge delight. They were carried down into the little church, and placed on some planks laid across the altar rails, in a capital light, and I had four hours at them in complete comfort, and enjoyed it thoroughly. It was so seldom that I could work under cover; what with the lava-dust, fatigue, rain, and wind, a painter is at a tremendous disadvantage here.

Perhaps it would be as well to state before proceeding further that the use of the church as a studio was perfectly orthodox and correct. Churches are invariably used as *barns*, excepting during the hours of service, which service (Lutheran) occurs perhaps every third Sunday.

I always made a practice of working in them whenever I had the chance, for the out-of-door sketching was very trying; in fact, I don't think painting was ever carried on under more aggra-

vating difficulties than I experienced in Iceland. To begin with, you cannot take canvasses on horseback (that is, if you have but one baggage animal). They would be in ribbons in half an hour. You cannot take Academy boards of more than a quarter size, in consequence of their certain fracture if larger, in travelling over lava. It is but seldom you can paint two consecutive days, as it is necessary to keep pushing on up the country; firstly, in order to complete your tour within your time; and, secondly, because one always feels a little delicate in inflicting one's society on a farmer for any lengthened period, especially when (as is frequently the case) he will accept no compensation for the expense he may be put to for board, lodging, and pasture. You are generally fatigued with yesterday's ride, you are certain to be with to-day's. Always dreadfully cold sketching out of doors, often wet through. The wind is invariably most boisterous, and not only do all your materials fly different ways, but you find yourself swaying like a reed, and any-

thing in the shape of careful drawing is impossible. You are generally very hungry, and can get but little you would care to risk eating, except in special cases, in the interior of the country. When, after infinite pugnacity and obstinacy, you have succeeded in making a water-colour sketch, you are pretty safe to have it swamped within three days in the next river you have to cross. If it be an oil (no matter for the latest improvements in carrying wet sketches) the next eight hours' jolting over the lava fields will soon prove that something is wrong somewhere, and your work will turn out more curious than beautiful. All this is dreadfully mortifying, but the circumstances detailed previously about the prussian blue will, to a painter, completely clinch the tale.

When the seals were completed I was called back into the house to supper, which I found had been considerably augmented in honour of my birthday. The great feature was rum-and-water, which was pressed upon me in large quantities. At the close of the entertainment, when most of


us were becoming exceedingly sociable and chatty, singing was suggested, and as I much wished to hear some "native minstrelsy," I eagerly seconded the motion, promising to give them some English songs in return. All the young ladies of the house then started off with a most attractive chorus. I don't know the name of it, but it was something that struck me as wonderfully unique. Then came some Icelandic verses, sung to "God save the Queen." This they vowed and declared was a national air. Afterwards we had a few ballads and hymns, and finally I was called upon for my share in the concert. I did my best, running through one or two little popular melodies, to the intense delight of the old priest, who, growing more and more excited as I went on with the performance, drew his chair close up to mine ; and, as I came to the end of the last song, and was dwelling for a moment on the high note in the last bar, gave me a most tremendous thump in the back, exclaiming, " Rule Britannia !" (the only words of English that he knew).

About twelve o'clock we retired to bed, as I wished to rise early on the Monday, in order to set out in good time for Eyrarbakki.

By eight o'clock on the following morning we had the boxes packed and the horses caught and saddled, and after a good breakfast, and the kindest of farewells from Mrs. Jonson and her daughters, we started. Mr. Jonson rode with us as far as the river Olvis-á, which we had to cross, as he very kindly said he could show us the best ford. We pushed along through some miles of boggy land before we reached the narrow part of the stream, where the banks were not much more than a quarter of a mile apart.

Wherever a river is at all fordable, or wherever it lies in the direct road between any two farms, a boat is generally to be found, but it is a work of some difficulty to procure a ferryman. On the present occasion we had to shout and signal for at least twenty minutes before the man on the opposite bank could be aroused from his lethargy, and then I think it was only the unusual sight of

a clean white shirt, which I had hoisted as a flag, that induced him to come over in his boat, impelled by sheer curiosity. We then bade farewell to our kind host, and the old gentleman shook hands with me very warmly, gave me an extemporaneous blessing, and kissed me on the cheek. The baggage and saddles were safely stowed at the bottom of the little canoe, and the horses tied by the under jaw with long horsehair ropes. We attempted to make a start, but the animals refused to move. I was completely non-plussed, and was wondering how we were to make them take the water, when Mr. Jonson solved the difficulty in an instant. He collected a large assortment of sharp stones and pebbles, and opened fire upon them from the rock above with tremendous effect. Two or three kicks and plunges, and in they went, Bjarni holding them from the stern of the boat. We rowed as quickly as we could across the river, taking care to keep the horses clear from one another as much as possible. I must confess, that to me, being



unaccustomed to it, the sight of the poor animals swimming against the rapid current across a river at least twice as wide as the Thames at London Bridge was rather painful. I expected to get into some difficulty every minute, as, do what we would, we could not keep them separate. They continually got on each other's backs, and fought and bit with the greatest ferocity. However, we reached the other side quite safely, and after a great deal of bad riding through miles of morass we sighted Fyrarbukki. So bad were the bogs that we simply dare not push on without something to guide us, so we bethought ourselves of making "Sudden Death" eminently useful. We drove him on ahead, and as long as he kept above ground we followed him, and wherever we saw him get into the last stage of difficulty we took warning by his errors and gracefully avoided the spot. Poor beast! he was in no danger, for whenever he sunk in up to the girths the travelling boxes slung at his sides came to his rescue and kept him from getting utterly involved, as

they projected at least eighteen inches from the saddle.

At about three o'clock we reached Mr. Thorgrimsen's, in time for an excellent dinner.

This house at Eyrarbakki is the central store of the south coast of Iceland, and consists of a dwelling, surrounded by some wooden warehouses, standing close down upon the beach.

It is the last vestige of civilization that the traveller meets with in journeying east, and, moreover, as it has the reputation of being the best establishment in Iceland, I determined to avail myself of my host's kind invitation to stop a day or two and enjoy a few hours' comfort before attempting a month of desert life ; a desert indeed so complete, that I always used to say, that if three people were seen together some great excitement must be on hand.

The luxury of this house must really seem extraordinary to a native Iclander. It is quite European in style, and possesses several exceed-

ingly nice rooms and, wonderful to relate, a *piano*, upon which my host's daughters played remarkably well. I can never forget the kindness with which I was treated. The free and easy style pervading the whole place was most delightful. I have seen rich things in great quantities in England, but never saw cream brought to table in a huge *washing* ever before dining here. It must have contained at least two gallons, and this in a country where pasture (of any quality) is so scarce.

When we had finished dinner Mrs. Thorgrimson and her daughters took care to make the evening pass most agreeably, and though our conversation was extremely limited, we got on very well. I played several refreshing games at *spollicans* with one of the young ladies, and was beaten every time. A friend has since suggested, "Spollicans in the wilderness."

On retiring to bed I discovered that the window of my room looked out upon Ingolfs fiall, a magnificent old mountain, and which, although

of no great size, is always full of interest on account of its prominent position, both on the face of the landscape, and in the early history of the country. It was here that Ingolf (the first settler in Iceland) desired to be buried, that he might behold all his vast possessions from its summit, at the last day. I was so struck by its romantic appearance as it stood boldly out against the midnight sky, that I slipped quietly out of doors, when all my friends were fast asleep, and took a slight sketch, which afterwards proved of the greatest service.

Next morning I was aroused by the rain coming down in torrents, and, as it looked like continuing for a long period, was much annoyed. My time was so very limited that a day was a very considerable loss. However, there was no help for it, and I had to content myself with taking hurried notes, in the intervals of the storms, all day long. It so happened that some Scotch merchants were buying ponies for exportation in this neighbourhood, so I had ample

opportunity for selecting one or two good subjects, as a great many countrymen had brought their stock down from the interior and were hoping to turn it to some profit. There were nearly 200 ponies and dogs waiting for buyers in different parts of the place, and such a quantity of queer-colored poodles it would be difficult to find again. I was also interested in the "Fiskr-manna-lestir," or "fish carriers," who made most effective and original subjects as they came riding in from the country, half-a-dozen at a time, with fifteen or twenty heavily-laden ponies, all running in single file. The dried fish, which strongly resemble parchment, are tied together in great bundles, and slung upon the pack-saddles, towering up three or four feet above the horse's head. Just as I was beginning to acquire a little useful information down came the rain again, and obliged me to give in.

As we were going to make a start on the morrow, I took the opportunity of buying a few necessaries before leaving all civilization behind

me, and some brandy, spare girths, &c., found their way into the travelling boxes.

Mr. Thorgrimsen appeared really sorry that I did not make a longer stay, but on explaining that my sole reason for wishing to push on was the little time at my disposal, he said he would not detain me, but exacted a promise to call upon him again on our return if we came within a day's journey.

So on Wednesday morning, after the stirrup-cup and all the good wishes of this kind family, Bjarni and I again were on the move. We were bound for Oddi, the residence of a priest lying (as the crow flies) about thirty miles off, but from the route we had to adopt, verging upon twice that distance. It was the hardest day's journey we had yet had, as the rivers were all much flooded, and the bogs in a most flourishing condition. For the first twenty miles the riding was certainly good, excepting in one instance, where my guide nearly "shuffled off this mortal coil" with his boots on, by riding into the middle of some quick-

moor. How the white horse got him out of it I can't think. They seemed to me to be both sinking at the rate of twenty miles an hour. However, all's well that ends well, and we rode on rapidly till we came to the river Thjórsá, one of the largest in the country. Its size can be imagined, for it took us more than one hour to cross it.

The first half we rode through, getting from sandbank to sandbank (only two of which were visible), the others being two or three feet under water. After wading, swimming, and splashing for about twenty minutes we got into the middle of the river on a long, black piece of quaking gravel, all around us water as far as we could see, bounded by the long, low line of coast. I confess to feeling rather nervous, for before us ran the deep half-mile of torrent, flooded by the melting snow from the interior, roaring and whirling as it dashed along.

Far away we could see the boat coming to us with some drovers, who were bringing across a

herd of ponies. They were all loose, and we watched them with the greatest interest, as from specks on the water they gradually grew larger in approaching us, till we could make out their frightened faces and hear their terrible snorting as they swam across the rushing current. They came out much exhausted, but otherwise none the worse. There were considerably more than forty of them, and, strange to say, there was not a single casualty.



When the boat had arrived we put in the saddles and baggage, and prepared to start. The cords which fastened the horses were held from

the stern, Bjarni taking two and I the other. As we shoved off I took a longing look at the mud-bank and a shuddering one at the water, and said, "Have you ever lost horses crossing a river?"

"Often," was the brief reply.

I said not a syllable more till some fifteen minutes afterwards, when we were once more safe on land.

The horses swam remarkably well, especially "Battle," and though the waves broke over their faces every two or three seconds they held on with undiminished pluck.

We again mounted, and after many, many miles of riding, and getting across two more small rivers, at length reached Oddi, where Mr. Jonson, the clergyman, took us in.

We had left Eyrarbakki at half-past twelve in the morning, and it was not until half-past eight that we reached the end of our day's journey. I was delighted to find that our friend the priest had some capital grass, which he gave me the run of for the horses. Poor things. We were always

more anxious about them than about ourselves ; for food of some kind we were always sure of, but their meals depended entirely on the quality of soil over which we happened to be travelling at the time.

The little house at Oddi was exceedingly comfortable, the food good, the bed clean, our host kindness itself. All this we were very grateful for ; but to make the evening complete, I found, to my intense joy, a Shakespeare lying in a dusty corner. I had brought no books with me, fearing they might tend to idleness, so that, on discovering this treasure, my delight was great.

During the night my old enemy the rain fell in torrents, and the wind worked itself into a fury. I was in hopes that the force of the tempest would have spent itself ere day, but was doomed to disappointment, for all the sketching accomplished on the Thursday morning was done from the window of the little sitting-room, under the serious disadvantage of almost utter darkness. I amused myself, usually on wet days, by attempting con-

versation with every one, and as hour by hour my ears grew more accustomed to Bjarni's English, he soon helped me to make some progress in Icelandic. On this occasion I made desperate efforts to talk with the son of our host, who was physician to the district and had spent some years in Copenhagen. He was exceedingly good-natured over my blunders, and produced a Danish-English phrase-book, which helped us along considerably.

I shall always remember the kindness of both father and son. They begged me to stay a week with them, an invitation I was very sorry to refuse. When leaving on the Friday morning, Mr. Jonson positively refused to allow me to give compensation to any member of his household.

As Friday was a fine day, we determined to take advantage of it, and put off our journey until night; so in the morning I worked at a sketch of the white horse, and afterwards took a little view of Thryhriningr (the three-corner of the Njála). Our next destination, Kross, lay some

miles away, down on the extreme south coast, and as the distance was by no means great, we determined to ride over quietly in the evening.

The air was exquisite and our ride delicious. We passed through the sweetest scenery I had yet come across in Iceland,—a lovely valley sweeping up the country for miles upon miles in the direction of Hlidarendé (Gunnar's home), and leading on and on up to the dim, mysterious, snow-peaks in the extreme distance; the whole picture interspersed with perfect cities of lava—stern, wild, and magnificent.

At ten o'clock in the evening we reached the far-famed Bergthorsvöll, the most interesting of all the scenes connected with the Njála. It was here that Njál was burnt by his relentless enemies, nearly 900 years ago. This was one of the places that I had come from England to see, and here it was at last.

The modern hovels that occupy the site of the old dwelling lie side by side upon a mound, which rises from the bank of the river Afall, the only

little eminence in a wild, desolate plain. I went down the slope of this hill, and saw with much interest the little hollow where the burners hid their horses, and the small bog or quick moss called Kári-tiorn, where Kári extinguished his burning clothes when he escaped from the awful conflagration. They say that many ashes and charred turfs and stones were turned up during the alteration of one of the sheds, but that everything that saw the light was immediately bought up by the roving Englishmen who make pilgrimages to this most interesting spot. When the exploration was finished I entered one of the cottages, and was very heartily welcomed.

I had had some thoughts, half an hour previously, of sleeping at Bergthorsvholl, but discovered that this (the one habitable house) contained but one habitable room, seemingly in a chronic state of darkness, and as near as one could judge about ten feet long by six wide. I can't say that I saw any one in this place, but felt seven or eight. The air one might have cut in slices

with a knife, it was so dense, and as for the one bed, on which they made me repose (as the seat of honour), I trembled as I lay on it.

It was a most remarkable fact, that one of our party invariably entered a room with a hideous expression upon his countenance and a great many forcible remarks upon his lips. He then sat down and rubbed his head. The explanation consists in the fact that the passage leading into the interior of each cottage is made of turf and lava blocks, with no lighting whatsoever, and that the cross beams of the doors and the supports of the roof are seldom more than five feet from the ground, and that in the impenetrable darkness mysterious bumpings would be heard, owing to the fearful concussions of this person's head against these unsympathetic obstructions. *That was me.*

Coffee was soon handed round, backed up by skier and new milk, for in the meanest shelly in Iceland these three things are always obtainable. The first is generally very fair indeed. The weak point in the bill of fare is the almost total absence

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of good solid food. In the neighbourhood of rivers and lakes, fresh fish is sometimes available in large quantities, but as a rule it is entirely confined to black bread and smoked meat so smoked, that though I eat it from sheer hunger, I could not share my room with it, on account of the dreadful smell. In the spring and early summer the geese and eider-duck's eggs are of great value to an Englishman; but their season is but a little while. Some of my experiences I have to say the least of it, original. But I think will well illustrate the state of our hunting in which I sometimes found myself. One day I shot a wild fowl's egg with the intention of eating it. I put it over my shoulder and when I stepped, we have chickens in the habit of putting in an unmistakable leg protruding from the shell. "Chicken," I said, "you stupid, do you think one eats his chickens? If there were only a bull in it!"

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"MY DINNER."

[To face page 70.]

But there are limits to even the coarseness of hunger. Some things I could not put up with, and though half starving, have turned away from in disgust. I remember on one occasion riding up to a farm, cold, wet, and famished, and, finding that there was nothing but black bread to eat, complained bitterly. Immediately an unfortunate sheep was dragged up to the door, kicking and struggling, and the owner thereof, making imaginary slices at the animal with his finger, said he would cut a beautiful chop from here or from there, in about ten minutes, if I would only wait.

But on this occasion at Bergthorsvohll the fare was not so bad. The surroundings were decidedly dirty, but the food, though coarse, was good of its kind, and the hospitality of the cottagers beyond all praise. Very fortunately, who should come into the house, but the priest of Kross (the place we were bound for), and when he heard we were strangers, and the object of our journey, immediately offered to show us the nearest way to

his own house, which he placed at my disposal for an unlimited time.

The kindness of these Icelanders may read like romance, but it is strictly true. I am quite aware that when Englishmen travel in parties, and keep (as they invariably do) exclusively to themselves, rarely taking the trouble to exchange a word with a native, that for a little assistance or lodging, they have to pay a fair price. With me it was utterly different; they saw that I was alone, with no stores, but one man, and three horses; and they treated me like a prince.

When we had saddled the horses, we bade our friends good night, and rode off down the river bank: the priest leading the way. We pushed on rapidly for some time, and then turned sharp to the left, across the water. The river at this point was more than half-a-mile wide, and by the time we had crossed it, we were all pretty well wet through. We then entered on a long, low plain, nothing but one continuous morass, stretching away without a single break to the sea-coast. Our host's house

stood on a slight bank, a few feet higher than the surrounding bogs ; a more dreadful situation for a dwelling was never seen. How tired I was that night ; I believe I fell asleep as I rolled off my horse.

On Saturday morning when we awoke, we found the house far more comfortable than we had imagined ; my bed, indeed, so much so, that I could not bear the idea of leaving it for a long time. But by ten o'clock, Bjarni and I were once more in the saddle, as I was very anxious to have a good sketch of Bergthorsvholm, from this side of the River Afall, and within an hour we were on the spot. Whilst I worked, my guide slept, and the horses grazed, and strange to say, although this was usually the state of affairs on these occasions, they were always more tired afterwards than I.

On our return I made a drawing of the Westmann Islands, and a great deal of trouble it gave me, as the effect changed every few minutes. An Iceland gentleman, Mr. Tomsen, who was staying at Kross, attempted to go over to his store on the islands towards six o'clock in the

evening, but had to give up all idea of doing so, as the wind was very high, and his little boat anything but equal to the twelve miles of dangerous sea that divides them from the mainland. He was one of those extraordinarily jolly men one meets with about twice in a lifetime, and though he spoke with such unusual rapidity that I could not understand more than half he said, such was the force of his own most genial, uncultivated manner, his boisterous good humour, and his tremendous laugh, that we fell in with each other perfectly, and parted with unfeigned regret.




THIRD WEEK.

THIS day was most interesting to me, on account of being able to witness the confirmation which took place in the little church of Kross. I was very fortunate in being present at such a ceremony, as they are of rare occurrence in such a thinly-peopled country. From ten o'clock till twelve, country people kept pouring in from all sides, mounted on every description of horse. In each family, the father usually rode first, then the wife (astride) with the baby behind her, holding on round her waist, then the more capable youngsters, generally in couples, two to every horse. When they had arrived at the church, the horses were turned loose or hobbled, and the owners betook themselves to worship. I should think that on the moor, round the building, there must have been upwards of two hundred animals

wandering at their own sweet wills. At twelve o'clock we went in, and after an hour of a long droning prayer, sung in a most dismal monotone, we had a sort of sermon, and then the confirmation began.

I was pleased with the appearance of the young people who had come to be confirmed, and was especially struck with the dress of the girls. The Faldr, or head-dress, was a sort of white cap of liberty, with a thin gauze veil attached. Their dresses were of black wadmál (a kind of coarse woollen cloth); the skirts were embroidered round the bottom with ornamental foliage in blue and green; the bodies were worked with silver round the neck, wrists, and back, and exceedingly pretty they were.

When the preliminaries had been gone through and the young Icelanders treated to a variety of lectures on the same subject by their venerable pastor, they were ordered to seat themselves round the altar rails, and were subjected to the most tremendous cross-examination I ever beheld

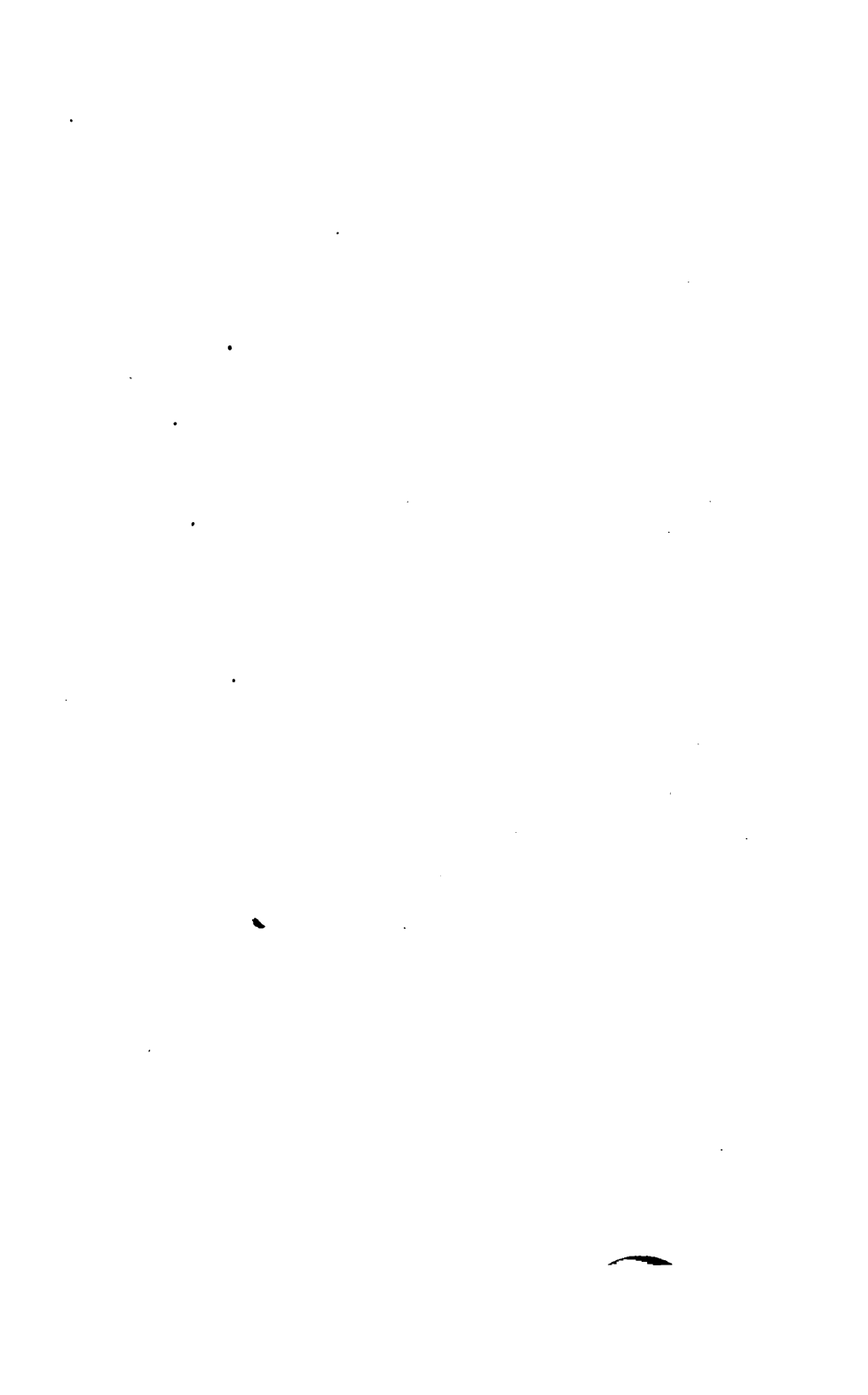




F. Alder. Old Style.



To face page 84.



in my life. There were nineteen or twenty of them, and they were victimised to the extent of nearly ten minutes apiece.

Though understanding but little Icelandic, one could see they were put through a sort of Catechism, and that most of the answers had been learnt by heart; and it was very interesting to watch the various ways in which the various minds stumbled along towards the same end, namely, "giving satisfaction."

As a rule, their rather blank and expressionless faces were drawn into an agonizingly nervous look as they answered each question put to them in a quaint, mechanical way. But one boy was an exception. He pleased me greatly, in that he had a covert look of innate intelligence which the others lacked, and (what so especially charmed me) he evidently knew far less about it than any of his brethren; and the bold way in which his native cheek helped him over the stony places was truly gratifying to an impartial observer. He got through better than any one,

and I was delighted to see virtue so well rewarded.

After more singing and praying and a short additional lecture to the confirmed, the service terminated, and we left.

Although the ceremony had been unusually long no one seemed to feel in the least degree tired or annoyed, for it was the universal custom for each member of the congregation to walk out of church at least once every half-hour, and when refreshed with brandy or what not, come back and talk a little with his friends through the window of the building, and eventually to resume his seat within. Snuff too, was a great resource. The horns were passed rapidly from hand to hand, and emptied in a most extraordinary way ; the men seemed to pour it into their nostrils. I never saw anything like it before. All these little things took a good deal of solemnity out of the service, and made me laugh more than once, but when the clergyman stopped in the middle of his blessing to spit with great velocity and accuracy, three con-

secutive times into the middle of the lane, I could keep my countenance no longer, but quietly crept out.

The evening was lovely, and as the congregation rode away one by one over the plain, I thought I had seldom seen so many interesting pictures condensed into half a day.

Before we retired to bed I was again requested to give a specimen of my vocal powers. It seems Bjarni had told them of my performances at Arnarboeli, so they were very anxious to hear an English song. I did my best, and when I found they were growing visibly sentimental over a funny little air went on the other tack, and tried "Jock of Hazeldeane." At this, strange to say, they roared. Perhaps it was my singing, for although I tried to put as much feeling as I was capable of into it, they evidently thought it contained some capital joke. Soon afterwards rum-and-water put in a welcome appearance upon the board, and I overwhelmed them with "A little more cider too."

When roused on the Monday morning, I discovered that the rain was hard at work again, and was obliged to confine my sketching to the house. The different members of the family were very busily engaged in some preparation, and hurried about the place as if their lives depended on it. I became curious to know the cause of so much excitement, and was told that a wedding was to take place in the little church on the following day. A piece of great good luck for me, as I wished to see as much as possible of the manners and customs of the country, and was consequently quite restless until the eventful morning arrived.

A glorious day it was too, that Tuesday. Everybody and everything seemed to be in good spirits, and the sun graciously shone upon us with quite a tropical heat.

Twelve o'clock was the time fixed for the ceremony, so after I had arrayed myself as gorgeously as the state of my wardrobe would permit, (or, to speak more plainly, when I had combed my

hair, and put a coloured handkerchief round my neck), I went out of the house to see what was going on. Before long I saw sundry little dots on the horizon, which rapidly developed into trains of horsemen. They came on at good pace, generally in parties of five or six, arrayed in every variety of Icelandic costume. They appeared far jollier than on the Confirmation day, and seemed evidently bent on festivity. As the clergyman and all the members of his family were in the house busily engaged in getting things in order for the approaching guests, I walked down the muddy pathway, and played the host with all the geniality that I was master of. I could not speak much, it is true, but it was a matter not worth mentioning, for we got on capitally without it. I shook hands with the men, took off my hat to the women, and kissed the children, and am proud to say the result was perfect.

This is written with confidence, because Bjarni afterwards told me privately that they had unanimously expressed their approval of me. In fact,

he said, they thought me "one very nice." This is a gross piece of egotism.

Troop after troop of friends and relatives gradually assembled on the green outside the house, and many many peculiar toilets did I see gone through unflinchingly under the public gaze. If any one happened to be rather wet or dirty after the long ride, down they sat on the grass and changed their stockings in the calmest way possible; and when they had made themselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit, walked to the house one after the other. When they had refreshed themselves to a great extent with the various liquids provided by their spiritual pastor, they betook themselves to church, marching out of the house in couples, headed by the bride and bridegroom, to one of the most dismal songs that could be imagined.

The company were, as usual, in their black wadmal dresses, but the bride wore a white faldr of imposing proportions. The bridegroom was old and rather inclined to be corpulent, but thoroughly



[To face page 90.]

good-natured and happy. The bride was young, but a decided shrew. I was sorry for the old gentleman, though I did congratulate him when the operation was over.

Seeing such a diversity in their ages, I could not help calling to mind a passage from that worldly-wise book, the Icelandic Edda, "It requires great good sense to be a skilful lover," and wondered how it applied on this occasion. The ceremony, which I watched from the gallery, took about three-quarters of an hour, and comprised a prayer, hymn, exhortation, and blessing.

When it was all over, and my old friend indissolubly united to the girl of his choice, the company again refreshed themselves, which they continued to do *on every available opportunity with the greatest determination and perseverance.*

The wedding breakfast, or rather dinner (for it was fixed for five), was to take place at the house of some relative about ten miles off, and as the aforesaid mansion was on my direct road to Selja-Land, I rode with the wedding-party so far.

We all mounted our horses, and started off to the number of about sixty, men, women, and children, trotting, galloping, and tumbling, over hills, through the water, and into the bogs, amidst plenty of good-natured laughter. And talking of the children, how they do ride! Behind me for ten miles of most difficult country rode two little girls astride, with halters for bridles, on two raw-boned Iceland ponies. One was nine years old, the other seven, and they went splendidly, and enjoyed the journey more than any of us.

When we reached the farm where the feast was to be held we found tents had been erected to accommodate the numerous company, and in one of these (a spacious marquee about four feet high, in which we were obliged to sit because we simply could not stand) the dinner was prepared. The good people much wished me to stop and partake thereof, but as I wanted to get to Seljä that evening I rode away with any amount of farewells and shakings of the hand. We had still some miles of nasty country to get over, and

experienced much difficulty in crossing two rivers swollen by the recent rains. As is always the case when the floods are high, it was necessary to employ a local guide as well as my servant to show us the safest way through the water. Thus, no less than two men and four horses were almost daily necessary to get me across this strange country.

Towards seven o'clock we reached our destination, and when we had refreshed ourselves, walked out to see the wonderful foss, or waterfall, for which the place is celebrated.

Afterwards, we returned to the house, when the owner of the establishment expressed great surprise and astonishment at the excellence of my horses; and as I had heard many of the same remarks at Kross on the previous Sunday, I became conscious that my animals procured for me an amount of respect that single-handed I could lay no claim to, and discovered that the fact of being the possessor of a respectable quadruped was as much a passport in Iceland as elsewhere.

Just before going to bed I suddenly discovered that some things had been left behind at Kross, and was obliged to send Bjarni back for them, with strict orders to return next day ; so I was left to do the best I could in a tiny hovel, occupied by a kind but shockingly dirty old man, his wife, and two grown-up daughters, besides others who seemed to have no recognised habitations, but who came in and out of the house quite promiscuously.

As the Americans say, I had "a rough time." The dinner was simply uneatable, some hard black bread, putrid mutton fat, and rancid cheese. I attempted the first with partial success ; the tallow I could not face, it was revolting, so fell back upon the cheese, which was merely repulsive, and, backed up by some tolerable milk and butter, managed somehow. After this, things went on tolerably till ten o'clock, when the old man, pointing to the remains of the feast, and then to an old rickety couch in the corner, hinted that I should have some supper, and go to bed. The first I declined with thanks ; the invitation to

sleep I would gladly have accepted, but was a little embarrassed by the presence of the two young ladies, who stood talking to their father in the most unconcerned way possible. This went on for at least half an hour, when the commander-in-chief, having again pointed to the bed, directed his daughters to undress me.

"Well," I said, mentally, "if you are agreeable, it does not become me to cry off. I am in Iceland, and must do as Iceland does."

So, Thorgerthur pulled off my coat, waistcoat, and shirt, Auna my riding boots, the old man helped me on with my nightgown, and the transformation was complete.

Where they slept, poor things, I cannot tell. Probably on the earthen floor in the adjoining shed.

They had done all in their power to entertain their guest. I thanked them for it heartily in more ways than one, but I must say my heart jumped when I left that house next day.

The principal object of my visit to this district

was to make a sketch of Seljä Land's Waterfall, a magnificent cascade, at least 400 feet high, as near as I could judge, and it seemed to me very hard that, after I had ridden so many miles, waded through so many rivers, and gone so far out of my way to gain my object, that the rain should be so determined to stop me. I tried, on Wednesday morning, in the intervals of a hurricane, but had to give in at last; not because I objected so much to the rain personally, but because my paint did. The big drops knocked the things about terribly, and finally made work an impossibility.

In the evening we moved on a few miles to a neighbouring farm, and after a light supper went to bed, as there appeared to be but little else to do.

After I had been asleep some hours, and was dreaming of all sorts of pleasant things, I was awakened by Bjarni. "What is the matter?" I said, angrily; "What do you want to disturb me for? Why are you dressed, and covered with

mud, and streaming with water, and generally objectionable?" For I perceived that he was the source of a large river that was running all over the room. I also became aware that all the household had just assembled in every stage of undress, and were apparently in a panting and exhausted condition, though from what cause I was unable to discover.

"I am very sorry," he said, "but they are none of them strong enough."

"What do you mean? Are you drunk?"

"No," he said; "and they tried for ever so long."

"Speak up, for goodness sake. What have you been doing?"

"Why," he replied, "I went out to try if the river was safe for to-morrow, and had to swim for it, and I'm full of water, and my things have all swelled, and there's nobody *can get my boots off*. *Will you come and try?*"

If an objectionable thing has to be done, it is better to do it at once. I jumped out of bed

and got hold of the right foot. Bjarni held on to the window-sill, and the whole of the family threw themselves upon him to sustain him during the approaching trial. There was a brief but exciting struggle, enlivened by the shrieks of the Icelanders and the groans elicited from poor Bjarni, whose leg was nearly dragged out of joint by the opposing forces, when with a "squish" the boot came off suddenly, and we all rolled on the ground together, to every one's huge delight.

The next day we left the little farm early, as we had determined to ride out to a lovely spot called Thorsmörk, if possible. So by half-past eight o'clock we were in the saddle, and when we had secured the services of a farmer to show us the way, went off up the valley.

We were very fortunate in having a good man to lead us, as Thorsmörk is known to very few. It is more than fifty miles from the nearest dwelling, and is situated in the midst of a perfectly desolate valley, surrounded by inaccessible mountains and precipices covered with eternal ice. The

only way to get to it is by waiting until the river Markafjot has sunk very low, which it does towards the end of the summer; otherwise it completely blocks the entrance by its huge volume of water. Even in the most favourable times the journey is very laborious, as one is forced to keep winding in and out amongst the crags which tower up on each side through a perfect labyrinth of many miles in length. .

The first part of our journey was through a beautiful plain which lay between the mountains. It had evidently once been a fertile spot, and where the few grass districts still held their own the soil seemed rich and the vegetation good; but the farther we rode the more evident it became that the snow was doing its work with frightful rapidity. Every spring the accumulated masses suddenly melt and carry everything before them, tearing away whole miles of herbage and covering the remainder with rocks, pebbles, and lava-dust. It is strange to see how the great strips of green have been sliced off the sides of the hills, as if cut

with a knife. What made the matter clearer still was the fact of our passing the foundations of several very old houses in remote parts of the place. They must have been of great age, for the most perfect of them was built entirely of stone—a thing never done now in Iceland. It was the old story of life versus climate, and, as is generally the case, the latter had got considerably the best of it.

As we drew near the narrow part of the valley the riding became dreadfully bad. The numberless torrents we had to get over were a great risk and trouble. They were all quite narrow, the largest being not more than thirty yards across, but the great pace at which they run, swollen with melted ice and snow, wears the channels very deep, and as the water is as thick as treacle, and the bottoms are strewn with huge angular blocks of lava, their passage is very trying. In the whole day's journey we crossed more than forty of these torrents. I kept the score upon the pommel of the saddle. Some were so bad that on more than one occasion

I thought my guide would have been swept away, his horse being hardly up to his weight. The great thing to beware of was *looking at the water*. You lose your head at once if you do so, as the eddies whirl round you so rapidly as to induce giddiness. Again, one must always take care that the horses do not get their feet fixed between the lava crags which cover the bottom, and if such an accident should occur, strike out for the bank at once, and leave the animals to take care of themselves. To be entangled with a horse in the water is a very complicated piece of business. Strange as it may read, I would rather cross a dozen ordinarily smooth rivers, getting from sandbank to sandbank, than one of these odious little mountain torrents.

Inside of this extraordinary valley the contortions and shapes assumed by the lava are really wonderful. On one side can be imagined a line of gigantic fortresses running on for miles, and on the other great churches and temples mixed up in most curious confusion. Above these come the

towering crags, topped by precipitous green glaciers, piled up and up until they are lost in the clouds, and from the junction of rock and ice, leaping like rainbows out of the sky, shoot countless waterfalls, making a series of exquisite arches as they fall into the valley below.

At the extreme end of this place lay the object I was in search of, "the wood of Thorsmörk."

Between the gigantic rocks come sweeping down to the river the loveliest green slopes, some hundreds of them covered with birch-bushes and underwood. This is one of the few places of the kind in the island, and owing to its extraordinary situation and inaccessibility, it is deemed one of the sights of the country.

After I had made a slight sketch we rode back, and saw on our way "the largest tree in Iceland." It is a mountain ash, and stands on the edge of a tremendous chasm, completely sheltered from the weather by huge lava cliffs. It is at least thirty feet high!!!

And now comes a curious question. How did

that tree get there? I had ridden at least four hundred miles about the country previously, and on my return must have accomplished as many more, and during the whole period never saw anything but dwarf birch and willow, averaging from one to five feet; not a symptom of another ash tree.

At the bottom of one of the bare hill sides, where all the earth had been carried down by the snow, the guide told us to dismount, in order to see some *men's bones*. He said that a battle had been fought there in Njál's time, and that of late years the relics of the slain had been brought to light by the torrent (everything happened in Njál's time according to the Icelanders). A good many must here have received their quietus, for within ten yards I picked up three femurs, a humerus, and two occipital bones, besides many fragments; and farther on the place was strewn with them. We took a few teeth as remembrances from one of the crumbling jawbones, and pushed on again for home. We had one more

torrent to cross, almost worse than any of the previous ones, and as we reached the water Bjarni turned round to me with the following words of comfort and consolation, "Mind you, mind you ; men dead here often."

We were thoroughly tired out when we reached the farm, and no wonder, for we had been eleven hours in the saddle exclusive of rests.

The two following days I spent in sketching various things about the house, and on Saturday afternoon devoted some hours to shoeing my horses. The rough riding of the past week had knocked their feet about terribly, and I began to be a little afraid lest they might break down altogether.

In the evening I was again requested to sing by the young ladies of the household, and agreed to do so on the condition that they should give me some Iceland songs in return. They were very shy about it at first, but when the ice was once broken I had the greatest difficulty in getting them to stop. I thought they would have gone

on all night. Even good music in excess is sometimes fatiguing. I had to endure for an unlimited period some of the most excruciating noises I ever recollect to have heard, and the best of it was, poor things, they thought they were giving me the liveliest satisfaction. I had not the heart to undeceive them.



Lady's Saddle.

FOURTH WEEK.

Sunday, 30th.

IN the morning I made a small study, and after a very tolerable meal and many good wishes, we rode off. All went well until we came to the river Markafjot, which happened to be very much flooded. Not liking to attempt a swim under the circumstances, we rode on down the bank for some miles, and fortunately found a house.

Knocking at the door, we asked, "Is the river very deep?" "Very," said a voice from the inside.

"Is there a man who will show us a ford?" we asked again.

"No," was the reply, "both Jon and Olavr are up in the mountains, but one of the girls will do quite as well. Here, Thora, go and show the Englishman the way."

Immediately an exceedingly handsome young woman ran out, and nodding kindly to me, went round to the back of the house, caught a pony, put a bridle on it, and not taking the trouble to fetch a saddle, vaulted on to its bare back and sitting astride, drove her heels into its sides and galloped off down the river bank as hard as she could go, shouting for us to follow.

We became naturally rather excited at such a display of dash, on the part of such a pretty girl, and started off immediately in chase. But though we did our utmost to catch her, she increased her distance hand over hand. There was no doubt about it, she had as much courage as ever we could boast of, and in point of horsemanship was a hundred years a-head of either of us.

For about half a mile we rattled along, when suddenly she pulled up short on a sand bank.

"You can cross here," she said, "but you must be careful; make straight for that rock right over there, and when you have reached it you

will be able to see the cairn of stones we built to show the landing place."

"All right," I said, "good bye."

She looked puzzled for a moment, and then said, "I'll come through with you, it will be safer."

"Good gracious, Bjarni, don't let her come," I said, "she is sure to be drowned, and I can't get her out with all these heavy clothes on; tell her to go back."

But before I was half way through the sentence, she had urged her horse into the water, and in a moment was twenty yards into the river; of course we followed as quickly as possible, and after a great deal of splashing, reached the middle of the flood.

"Now," she said, bringing her horse up abreast with mine, and pointing with her whip, "there's the mark."

The water was running level with the horses' withers, and it was only by lifting their heads very high that they could keep their noses clear.

"Good bye," she said, "God bless you," and before I was quite aware of it, kissed me on the cheek.

I was about to return the compliment, but she was gone, and a few minutes later we saw her a mere speck in the distance galloping over the plain.

Kissing in Iceland is a custom similar to shaking hands here. I had thought nothing of it in ordinary situations, but a kiss in the midst of boundless waters was, to say the least of it, strange. It was certainly the *wettest one* I ever had in my life.

Towards the afternoon we reached a small farm lying under one of the spurs of Eyja Fialla Jokull, and determined to stay there for the night.

As it was still very light, I got out my materials and began to work to the intense admiration and astonishment of the people in the house. They were a good deal pleased with my painting in monochrome, but when I began retouching an oil sketch, their interest visibly rose. The "cobalt

blue" amused them, the "emerald green," caused much excitement, but on the first appearance of the "chrome yellow," shrieks of delight went round the room.

Just before going to bed, I discovered outside the house an English pick-axe and some cart wheels. This seemed so extraordinary in a country where both are unknown, that I asked where they had come from, and of what use they were. The farmer gave me to understand, as nearly as I could judge, harassed as I was by Bjarni's bad English and my execrable Icelandic, that they were part of the cargo of an English vessel, that had been wrecked some time previously on the southern coast. For all I know the circumstances of the catastrophe may have been most heartrending, but my partial understanding of the story put the whole thing in a most ludicrous light. I believe he said that the ship was laden with materials for working the sulphur mines, and that one winter's night, the leader of the expedition found himself ashore in Iceland, but not


quite in the way he had originally intended, as his sole companions, out of the entire ship's company, consisted of two able seamen, the pick-axe, and the cart-wheels. When he found that he had met with a decided failure, nothing daunted, he determined to make the best of it, and on the following day, held an impressive auction in the presence of the few inhabitants of the district, and disposed of his effects, with much ceremony, to one or two enterprising speculators, who had not the remotest idea of the use of their purchases. When all things were satisfactorily completed, he pushed on to Reykjavik. This is very probably quite a mistaken account, but it is what I gathered from our voluble host, and I could not help laughing heartily, to think of the solemnity of the proceedings as described by the farmer, and of the grave Englishman, sitting on a barrel, and knocking down his large and varied assortment of goods to the bidding of the innocent natives.

On Monday morning we rode off early to

Hlidarendé, the most sacred spot in all the country to any one conversant with Gunnar's life. I was very anxious to make a correct sketch of the place, and was determined to spare no pains to accomplish it. Ever since reading the *Njála*, many months previously, I had been burning with impatience to see the home of the noblest man in all Icelandic history—his home, indeed, in death as well as life,—and to try and realize for myself the circumstances of the last dreadful scene in his eventful career.

We found the site of the house, as described in the *Saga*, situated upon the side of a range of low green hills, very still, very quiet, and utterly desolate and forgotten.

Beneath runs the river Thverá. We climbed up the slope and sat down under the shadow of the poor hovels that stand by the old dwelling, behind which we could trace distinctly the walls of the "*Salr*," or ancient hall. Far away in front of us we beheld the great waste plain that sweeps uninterruptedly down to the coast. All that had





HLIDARENDÉ.

To face page 112.

once been the most exquisite grass lands in the country, all that had been one of the sweetest scenes in the whole wide land was now but dust and ashes, and where Gunnar's cornfield had bloomed in all security there was nothing but a waste of waters and shifting sand.

The volcanoes of Kotlugia and Skaptar Jökull have desolated the one, and the river Thverá the other.


This wilderness was of all places in the world the most touching to me. It really seemed as if the beauty of the spot had cared to exist no longer since the hero was dead, and had let the elements work their destruction upon the scene, to obliterate it utterly, and to leave, like its master, but a memory behind.

It was along that plain of cinders that Gunnar rode with his brother to join the ship that was to bear him away into exile an outlawed man. It was from yonder hillock that he turned back to take a last look at the beautiful valley, his homestead, the river, and the fields of waving corn. It

was there that his resolution failed him, he burst into tears, and turned home again—to his death.

I walked a little higher up the bank, and when I had found a favourable spot, commenced sketching. I had not been at work long when an old man joined me, and pulling a worn edition of the Saga out of his pocket, began to read to me of Gunnar's death. He read how his enemies had set out that autumn evening, and, after decoying the faithful dog Samr out of the house, had attacked Gunnar in overwhelming numbers, and slain him cruelly on his own threshold; of the awful loss the assassins sustained in the attack, of the wounds and death the hero dealt amongst them ere he fell, and of the dastardly conduct of his wife Hallgerda, who refused to plait him a bowstring of her hair when he was in his last extremity.

When the old man had finished reading I took the book from his hand, and found it to be written in double columns, Icelandic upon one side and



Latin upon the other, probably translated by a native clergyman.

We then pushed on up the hill for some little distance, and found a cairn.

"It is Gunnar's grave," said the old man. "Here they buried him; and beneath yon boulder of lava-rock they put his bright clothes and armour, and no one has dared to touch them to this day. But though his body was laid here in its grave, his spirit rested not in the stony chamber, for on the starlit nights the war songs he had sung in life were heard again upon the hillside, and magic lights were seen to burn within the cairn."

How strange it all seemed. The stern reality of the story; the romantic incidents connected with the place; the splendid qualities and chivalrous courage of the man. And what remained? An old-world legend and this heap of battered stones.

* * * * *

I picked some little flowers from the mossy

bank, and after packing up the sketch, rode on to Breithabolstadt. The clergyman who occupied the farm was absent when we arrived, but his sister welcomed us heartily, and made us exceedingly comfortable. With one thing I was especially delighted, the quantity of excellent pasture; for my poor horses were considerably gone off in point of personal appearance during the last few days.

As my sketch of Hlidarendé was taken from the higher ground, and did not include the magnificent landscape which lay behind the farm, I rode out the next morning up the valley in search of a favourable position for a picture. When I had ridden about three miles I found the exact spot I wanted, and as all around was lava-dust and rock, without a vestige of food for the animals, told Bjarni to go back to the farm and let them have the advantage of the pasture. "I will walk back in the evening."

"Very well," said Bjarni. "Good bye."

I then fell to work, little knowing of the thrilling adventure that was in store for me.

The wind was so excessively high that I was obliged to sit in the tiny doorway of a turf sheep house, in order to keep my board steady. I suppose I must have been engaged about two hours, and was thoroughly engrossed with my work, when I became conscious, firstly, of the noise of something rapidly approaching, and then of a series of the most terrific bellowings I ever heard in my life. I looked up, much alarmed, and saw one of the savage little brindled bulls coming up the hill at me as fast as possible, his eyes glaring savagely, and his tail in the air. I dropped my brushes and crept inside the hut, and the brute, close at my heels, attempted to follow. Fortunately, the doorway was much too narrow; so, after a good deal of pushing and blustering and tearing the turf with his horns, he left off trying to force an entrance, and contented himself with marching up and down outside. Meanwhile, although I felt excessively frightened, I was wondering how on earth I was going to get away, for my friend outside seemed so determined on a

closer acquaintance, that every now and then he put his head in at the doorway, and gave me the benefit of an additional bellow.

The place was so dark that I could see no weapon of any kind for some time, but eventually found a heavy log of pine wood, which I thought might prove useful. I was only too conscious that if it was to be a case of strength, I should be nowhere, so determined to try the effect of a surprise. I took the log in both hands and crept up close to the entrance, and waited till, in a careless moment, he had turned his back to me, sprang out, and hit him inside the hock a most convulsive blow, and instantly bobbed back again into the hovel.

The effect was tremendous. Almost paralyzed, and with his leg drawn up in the direst agony, he staggered a few paces, fell on his knees, and grovelled in the sand ; and as I sat in my little fortress peace flowed into my soul. A moment after he rose, cast one terrified look round ; but there being no foe visible, he evidently thought he

was the victim of an enchantment, and uttering one long and hideous yell of concentrated anguish, bolted off into the wilderness, and, thank goodness, I have not seen him since.



I walked back to supper a sobered man. Just before entering the farmyard I met Bjarni, and told him of my escape. "Oh," he said, "it would have been all right. If he had killed you, we should not have let you lie out there. We'd have put you in the churchyard up yonder quite properly." Consolation.

The next day we left Breithabolstadt at eleven o'clock, in order to reach the nearest farm to the

foot of Hekla before evening. The weather looked merely stormy when we started, but before we had ridden five and twenty minutes the storms concentrated themselves into one continuous hurricane, which lasted without the slightest intermission for seven hours, five of which we had the full benefit of, as it was not till half-past four that we reached our destination, Selsund. And now I come to think of it, how relative is comfort. During our mid-day halt, amidst the pouring rain, cold though I was, and perfectly wet through, I thought sitting under the shelter of a mass of lava, and drinking cold coffee out of a dirty beer bottle, the very climax of earthly happiness. As we came across the tops of a range of desolate hills, without the smallest warning, my horse sunk suddenly into some quick moss, and in a moment was up to the points of his shoulders. I threw myself off and rolled away, fortunately in time. In a little while he struggled out, very black and exhausted, but otherwise none the worse.

When we reached the farm we put on what

dry things we had, and dried the others over the fire, in a little hovel used for shoeing the horses, and very black they became in consequence. I laughed to think of what my civilized friends would have said to see me (a dirty and begrimed individual) sitting before a forge-fire with nothing on but my shirt, in a perfectly black hut, about six feet by four, drying my blanket-coat and roasting myself at the same time; whilst my servant, equally wet and dirty, assisted me by blowing the bellows.

I slept that night, on a deal box, in my clothes, stiffened by the dry mud until they resembled armour. And oh, what a feast the fleas had from the time I lay down until I rose next day.

On Thursday I put up my fly-rod for the first time, and made a desperate attempt to catch some fish in the brook, but failed signally for the very obvious reason that there were none there. We started for Hekla before mid-day, and reached the foot of the mountain after about an hour's riding. Although the sun was shining brightly, there was

the usual fog on the summit, so remembering the advice of an Iceland gentleman, who had strongly urged upon me the absurdity of going to the top to see nothing, I merely inspected the effects of the last eruption.

This Iclander had very sensibly remarked "that travellers in Iceland are invariably anxious to ascend Hekla because it is the fashion. Now there is no more desolate and uninteresting place in the whole Island, for even on a clear day, which is a great rarity, the view is nothing to speak of, and after coming from the loveliest spot in the country, Thorsmörk, it is sheer waste of time." As for the ascent being surrounded by perils, I can distinctly affirm to the contrary ; for within a week after I left, three young Scotch ladies went up to the top, and thought nothing of it.

At a little farm-house under the rocks we picked up a farmer, and under his guidance started off to see the latest of the lava streams.

"For many years previous to 1845," he told us, "the country round the mountain had con-

tained good grass, but in the September of that year the lava was thrown up out of the crater, like torrents of water, amidst the most tremendous fire and smoke. So great were the quantities of it, and so vast the streams, that they ran like great serpents over the land, and cooled in solid hills, of fantastic and desolate appearance, with a belt of arid black sand of great extent round each of them."

Whilst we stood on one of these natural temples, the guide pointing to a little spot of green, in the midst of which we could see the remains of an old farm-house, all surrounded by a perfect city of lava, said, "In that place I was born ; it was my father's house ; and these heaps of stone cover what was once one of the loveliest farms in all Iceland. I was sixteen years old then, and we had to fly for our lives."

"The noise and rumblings made by the ground were terrible. A man was actually killed by a stone, thrown up by the eruption, even so far off as the west coast. The fish were destroyed by the

heat of the rivers, the coasts were covered with wrecks; in fact, it seemed to affect everything. One of the strangest sights was to see the fields swell up into hills as the lava rushed along underground."

"Though my farm (the nearest of all to its foot) is a great distance from the mountain, I sometimes feel very nervous even now, as lately steam has been seen escaping in several places, and the earth on the summit is quite hot enough to burn one's boots."

When I had taken some specimens of lava, we dismissed our guide and rode off to Skál. As we had had nothing to eat since breakfast, we asked the people at the little house lying under the hillside for some dinner. They were most willing to do all in their power to satisfy us, and gratified though I was at their open-handed hospitality, I felt considerably embarrassed by the number of extraordinary substances included unwittingly in the bill of fare. Some time previously I had discovered that the cottagers make their butter on

the same principle as we do our mortar, that is with plenty of cow's-hair in it, but it was not until this occasion that I was favoured with *wool in the bread*. I had commenced my dinner very ravenously, and was eating in a great hurry, when I discovered that I had a supply of worsted in my throat, amply sufficient to make a pair of the very largest and thickest winter mittens that any one could possibly desire. This put me out, as I ran a considerable risk of choking myself, and I rather sarcastically informed my host that "there must be considerably more wool in Iceland than in any other part of Europe, for in England we certainly could not afford to take it internally, but reserved it for outward application in the shape of cloth and flannel."

When the inner man was reinvigorated by successive doses of corn brandy and high meat, we caught our horses and pushed on for Asum. The only obstacle that lay in our way was my old friend the Thjorsá, the accursed Thjorsá. The evening, strange to say, grew very dusk, almost

English in its density, and by ten o'clock, when we had reached the sandbanks, the opposite side of the river was but barely visible.

If any person wishes to find out of what human voices are capable, I would recommend a river-side at midnight, the only shelter available fifteen miles away, the wind blowing knife-blades, and just a chance of a ferryman somewhere on the opposite shore !

How we yelled and signalled ! how we screamed and raved ! Just as we were about to give up in despair, after a long half-hour's exertion, we saw a boat coming over, and rejoiced accordingly. As the river in this part of the country runs between two high walls of rock, and is not more than half its average width, the waters are proportionately rapid and the current very strong. When the boat came near we saw that it was pulled by a single man. He had very hard work to get across, and was much exhausted when he reached us, as he had been carried a considerable distance down stream, and was obliged to pull back again.

The little boat was so absurdly small that both Bjarni and I agreed that it would be far safer to make two journeys; so I went first with the baggage and saddles, and after some very hard pulling, during which time the great waves broke all over me and half filled the boat, arrived safely on the other side. The man then put back for Bjarni, and I sat down on a stone to watch the proceedings, for I felt very anxious about my horses.




I saw them start, and for half way across all seemed well; but when they entered the rapids, the boat began to spin, and the horses went down,

one after the other. Again I saw them come up, but much farther off than before, and perceived they were drifting down the stream at a great pace. Farther and farther they were hurried on till they rounded a bend in the river, and the rocks hid them from view. I was in a great state of mind, I must confess—not for Bjarni or the boatman, as I knew the boat would ride the waves well when free, and that they were in no danger whatsoever, but I thought that when they found themselves almost dragged under by the horses they might be forced to cut them loose.

So when I saw them disappear round the point I pulled all the baggage together in a heap, and started off down the bank as hard as I could go, through a sort of valley of rocks, climbing, slipping, and tumbling. After about half a mile of this work, I arrived panting at the next bend of the river, and to my great joy espied my three poor nags lying down upon a sand-bank, quite exhausted.

I waded out to them, and led them ashore.



They were so glad to find themselves on land again, and showed their satisfaction at the sight of me by many uncouth antics. The boat was still some distance out, and it was a considerable time before the dripping voyagers could make a landing.

I had seldom felt so completely satisfied, as I did when we were riding safely over the moorland once more, and all the bothers and anxieties of the river were left behind. Bjarni told me that he thought he must have lost two of the horses, and said we had been very fortunate. About half-past eleven we reached the farm-house at Asum, and as it was so late, and every one gone to bed, we were obliged to shout and hammer at the door for some time before the owner of the place appeared. He was not at all put out by our unexpected arrival, but gave us an excellent supper, and laughed and talked heartily with us whilst we ate, and finally shook me down a capital bed in the corner.

As the country round the farm-house abounded in trout-streams, I set off on Friday morning to

I had taken with me two boys, to carry my things and make themselves generally useful but unfortunately they proved a complete failure, for just as I had emerged from the chasm, into the daylight, and had laid my tackle down on the grass, they came galloping by and took all four of our horses over the rod, and of course

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broke it. It took me nearly an hour to repair damages. Strange, apathetic creatures these lads were: they seemed equally indifferent to security and danger. I had not resumed operations very long after the accident, when I got my hook fixed in some stones at the bottom of one of the largest waterfalls in the gill, a place where the water ran so strongly and boiled so furiously, that it was with great difficulty we could talk to one another on account of the noise. I turned to one of my small satellites and said,

“I must break it, I suppose?” meaning the gut.

He did not even take the trouble either to answer me or take off his coat, but deliberately walked into the water, which was nearly to his shoulders, and holding himself up with great difficulty by a slippery boulder, managed to release the line. This done, he walked out and sat down on his original seat, a lump of lava, just as if he had never moved. He did not even take the trouble to wring the water from his clothes.

Later on in the day an incident occurred, which has given me a considerable horror of precipices.

I was going down a very steep bit of rock, step by step, holding on by the little projections, and had stopped to rest about half way. The boys, who were some little distance behind, concluded I had reached the bottom, as they could not see me, and began to descend. As they clambered carelessly over some big boulders, they managed in some mysterious manner to dislodge them. I heard the rush of something behind me, and immediately after was struck in the side by a stone, which knocked me from the lava ledge I was sitting on, down to the next one. It was the most fortunate accident, for in the same second, a lump of rock, weighing at least half a ton, came down the cliff with a roar, and pitching on to the very place where I had been sitting, bounded off with a tremendous spring into the gulf below.

I felt dreadfully sick, I must confess, and as I was most anxious to get to the bottom

without a recurrence of the same sensational performance, shouted to the boys, that if they moved, I should certainly be killed, managed to reach the gill without further trouble. The poor boys were very sorry, and a good deal alarmed, for they had very nearly been carried down themselves.

Moral.—"In descending a precipice go last." I always shall.

When I had filled my basket with small fish, we rode back home, and got something to eat, and afterwards walked across the moors to Stori-Nupur to see an extraordinary old Church.

It certainly was a quaint looking edifice, as the side walls were not anything like three feet high, and the roof ran up to a very acute angle. The whole building (if one may call it so) looked like an overgrown ant-hill, and the sheep were browsing on the summit. From a distance I had seen what I thought to be a very peculiar looking turret at the east end, but on closer inspection it proved to be an old ram fast asleep on the ridge.

The inside of the place was full of rude carving, and every available seat was packed with



fleeces and dried fish for winter use. On one of the walls was a picture, at least I think it was a picture, I am not sure whether it was meant to represent "The last Judgment," or "Jonah and the Whale," there was so much mystery and judicious shadow in it, but I could perceive indications of a sea-monster somewhere. I know that if my first supposition is correct, and it was a work of art, it must have been by some very old master indeed.

Saturday I remained about the farm and sketched hard. Nothing worth remarking took

place all day, but in the evening we had a slight diversion, as our kind host got thoroughly drunk. It was after supper that the idea seemed to strike him that he should like to taste my whiskey. I must state that he was fairly jovial before I acceded to his request and produced my stone bottle, for he had previously disposed of the better part of a pint of brandy-vin. I gave him the bottle. He drew the cork with his teeth, poured me out the little schnapps-glass full, and then, instead of pouring out one for himself, exclaimed "Skál" (the usual salutation), put his lips to the bottle, and gulped down three or four large mouthfuls of strong Scotch whiskey. This was all very well, but I found that to every teaspoonful that I secured he drank a teacup, for each time he wished to drink he made a feint of filling my tiny glass, and then drank as deeply as before. A few minutes later it became necessary for him to lean his back against the wall. Soon afterwards, his feet slowly slid from under him, and, with a spasmodic grunt of "Skál," he came down full length

upon the floor, whence he was afterwards removed with some slight difficulty. The principal thing I objected to was the ruthless way in which my liquor had been appropriated. However, I grew wiser by experience, and on many other occasions have been able to defeat the intended trick, by taking the bottle myself and giving my friend the glass.

FIFTH WEEK.


Sunday, July 7th.

IN the morning, whilst the family were at prayers, I went for a long ramble by myself, as I could neither follow their service nor join in their excruciating singing. After dinner I did a deal in horseflesh. I felt very like the Scotchman, whose principles prevented his bargaining on the Sabbath, but suggested that, "Supposing it were Monday, how much would you give me for the old grey



mare?" The fact was, my poor baggage-horse had become worse and worse for the past three weeks, and the raw upon his back had rendered him almost useless, so that each time he had occasion to carry the pack-saddle the sore grew more and more inflamed.

I had determined to sell him on the first opportunity, as I knew that were he turned loose for a week or two he would be as well as ever. Now, I was quite aware that, if the animal was sound, I could hardly expect to realise more than half his cost price, and under the circumstances thought I should be fortunate if I got a quarter. However, I was extremely fortunate, as my host not only gave me twenty dollars for him (the raw back included), but put another excellent animal at my disposal until the end of September (if I should remain in the country so long). So, poor "Sudden Death" was released from his bondage, and I saw him driven out upon the mountains with others of his kind. I was glad for his sake, poor fellow, but sorry for my own; for I felt that



one of the principal amusements in my long tour had left me for ever—my low comedian had made his exit.

The next morning, when I parted from my kind entertainer, I gave some hooks to his son to assist him in his fishing, and so greatly were they appreciated, that I was instantly presented with a beautiful pair of long woollen stockings in return. After the stirrup-cup we rode off in the direction of the geysers, a long day's journey.

The day was fine, and after a couple of hours' fast riding in a very hot sun we reached Hrúni, where I was blessed with a piece of thorough enjoyment in the shape of a bath in the hot well. Baths are regarded by the Icelanders more as luxuries than necessities, so that my washings during my sojourn in the country had been limited in the extreme, and when I saw the warm water determined to avail myself of the opportunity. At a little distance from the boiling spring the country people have dug a long trench, and lined it with rough stones. It is filled with water to

the depth of about three feet. As the water has to run some few yards along the open ground before falling into the tank, the temperature is just suited to bathing. I unpacked one of my boxes, secured my soap and sponge, and after placing all my clothes under my mackintosh (for it had suddenly commenced raining), jumped into the bath. It was very hot, but very delightful, and the most refined luxury I ever enjoyed; for after so much hardship and fatigue, nothing could exceed the delightful reaction produced by the warm water.

When I had thoroughly exhausted the novelty of the situation I got Bjarni to dry me with my solitary towel, and after my toilet was once more complete rode on to the geyser, which we reached about five o'clock in the afternoon. As we were both tired and hungry we did not take more than a cursory glance at the wonderful phenomena which lay scattered round us, comprising hot fountains, mud craters, and large and small boiling springs, but rode on to the farm of Haukadals,

where we hoped to get food and rest. Food we certainly obtained, and of fair quality (for Iceland): as for the "rest," it was a satire upon repose. I think I may state with truth that at this house my sufferings reached their climax. For the last three or four weeks I had become reconciled to the ordinary species of flea which is frequently met with everywhere in this country, but never before had I been the victim of such a terrific onslaught as fell to my lot that night. Though dog-tired I was awakened at least every ten minutes by these horrible brutes, and after killing about half of those I could see, used invariably to fall asleep again before I had completed my work of destruction, only to be again aroused by a worse attack than before. The only way that I can account for their extreme voracity is by the supposition that no Englishman had slept in the neighbourhood for some weeks, and that they were positively on the verge of starvation owing to the utter impregnability of the native Icelanders.

After a hearty breakfast on the following

morning we walked out to the geysers, which I felt anxious to see, as I had both read and heard so much about them. They have been so frequently described that I shall content myself with saying, that wonderful as the appearance of these huge cauldrons of boiling water must necessarily be to a stranger, and marvellous as the eruptions are known to be, I think the aspect of the valley below far more interesting.

On the 9th of July, at about eight o'clock in the morning, hundreds upon hundreds of jets of steam, some of great size, were issuing from the ground upon all sides, and towards the west they appeared to extend along the boggy country for more than half a mile. There was no wind, and the steam ascended perpendicularly into the air in unbroken columns, giving one the idea of being surrounded by an army of tall white ghosts.

As the large geyser showed no signs of an eruption, we proceeded to enrage his irritable relative the "Strokkr." For about twenty minutes

Bjarni and I worked hard cutting big turfs, and when a sufficient number had been collected, we carried them to the edge of the boiling spring, and pushed the whole load over plump into the well. In a short time the steam got up thoroughly, and after a few preliminary leaps the water shot out of the mouth of the spring with tremendous force, carrying up the clods of turf at least sixty feet into the air. The great sods fell all round us, and when we examined them the grass was found to be completely cooked. This ebullition was certainly very fine, though somewhat laughable, as Strokkur seemed so angry, and continued to spit in such a spiteful and petulant way, long after the first jet of water had subsided.

When all was over I got out my paint-box and began to sketch the large geyser. Simultaneously down came the rain. It was very provoking, but there was no help for it, and as there was no shelter near, I had to cover myself and my paraphernalia up in the macintoshes as best I could, and whistle for fine weather. At three o'clock I

sent Bjørn back to Hanksåsen to get me some dinner, and an hour later he appeared upon the scene with the three usual courses. Number one, three wedges of dried raw fish much resembling enormously thick pieces of semi-transparent ~~carrot~~, and hard as flint; number two, ditto, ditto, black bread; number three, one bottle of cold black coffee.

There is certainly one satisfaction about hard food, the sufferer leaves off eating with a feeling of such intense exhaustion after the superhuman efforts made in endeavouring to devour the dried fish (which tears with a loud crackle like parchment), that he is almost persuaded that he has eaten more than is really the case, and the feeling of gratitude which pervades the senses on the accomplishment of such a tremendous task often compensates for the lack of a more appetizing dish.

Towards evening the rain cleared off, and I lay down upon the side of the geyser, to bask in the sun and gaze down into the depths of the exqui-

site green water. As I looked, I became conscious of written characters graven upon the basin. Yes; there was no doubt of it. Even here, on one of the most interesting of natural phenomena, even here had the irrepressible Briton inscribed his name. I had seen writings of this kind upon the walls of many places of interest in England—on the tombs in our cathedrals, on the statues in our museums, and had not been surprised; but I must confess I was quite taken aback to find them upon the geyser.

On the other side of the water too, I found more than a dozen initials and dates deeply graven in the rock, and close to the edge of the well, in the centre of the basin, covered by more than a foot of boiling water, I found a girl's name—an English one—deeply cut in two places, "Fanny," and further on another, "Laura." I looked and pondered for a long long while, and the more I thought the more I wondered that any man could be so idiotic as to write inscriptions in such places. Then, I sat down again, and drew out my knife.

I pared a little piece of broken nail from my finger, whittled a few notches off my stick, chipped some little splinters of deposit from the edge of the basin, and finally, drifting into the fashion of my predecessors, cut something upon the rock : it was a girl's name,—an English one, ---but it was not Fanny or Laura.

* * * * *

On Tuesday night we were awoke out of our first sleep by a tremendous knocking at the farmhouse door, and our host went out to inquire the reason. After a brief conversation in the yard, he came in, fetched his hat, and marched off with the strangers. We were curious to know what was the matter, but were obliged to wait until the farmer returned in the morning to satisfy our curiosity.

It seems that some English people had arrived at the geyser in the night, with several men, tents, &c., and about fifteen or sixteen horses, and that when they wished to pitch their tents had made the startling discovery that all

three of their guides had become hopelessly drunk after helping themselves freely to their masters' brandy vin, and were, in consequence, quite unable to render any service whatever. So our friend the farmer had done all he could to assist them in this emergency, and had pitched the tents and tethered the horses, to say nothing of the splendid volley of abuse with which he had greeted his inebriated countrymen.

I was delighted at the prospect of seeing some English faces after so many days in the wilderness, and in great hopes moreover, that I might be able to procure a newspaper to read, as I had felt the evenings to be very dull without literature of any kind. So when we had snatched a hasty breakfast on Wednesday morning, we rode off to the tents, which we could see distinctly from the house. As we drew near the little camp, the first object that caught my eye was a great piece of canvas thrown loosely over a confused heap of what appeared to be old clothes. The tramp of our horses on the lava caused a commotion, for the

canvas was presently kicked off, and we saw the three guides laying perfectly incapable on their backs, two of them in a state of stupor. The third waved his hand, kicked up his legs, shouted out some unintelligible jargon, and exhausted with the effort tumbled back upon the prostrate bodies of his comrades and went to sleep again. It was simply disgusting. They richly deserved a good horsewhipping all round, and I greatly wonder that their English employers forebore to give it them.

A little farther on I saw the large tent, and on riding up was cordially welcomed by three English gentlemen. They asked me many questions concerning the fishing and sport in general, for they were in want of information, having been out but a short time.

"Since we left Reykjavik three days ago," said one, "we haven't seen a soul; the country seems quite deserted. I suppose your party finds it much the same?"

"Party," I said; "I have none. I am quite

alone. As for the natives I have met in the open country, they certainly would not average two a day."

"Have you been out long?"

"Nearly five weeks."

They seemed rather surprised at this, principally because I had but three horses, every one of which was in capital condition. They then asked if they could do anything for me, or if I was in want of anything that they could supply from their own stock.

"There are two things," I said, "that would be equally welcome. I don't know which to ask you for—a book or a piece of bread."

Books they had none, but a large loaf was instantly put into my travelling box, and many more good things pressed upon me in the kindest possible way, but I was compelled to refuse them, as I had no place to stow them in. They told me all the latest news, and I listened to their talking with inexpressible pleasure, for I had heard no English since I left Eyrarbakki, four weeks previously.

With many good wishes, we then bade them adieu, and rode on towards Sorg, which was reached late in the evening, where we received the gratifying news that the English letters had arrived, from a native just returned from Reykjavik.

As letters were the most welcome of all unlooked-for things at that time, I despatched Bjarni on Thursday morning to fetch them, and as Reykjavik was distant nearly thirty-five miles, he took two horses, hoping to return by evening. I employed myself in sketching vigorously all day, and in the evening walked out upon the hills to see if I could discover anything of my messenger, but he did not appear; nor on the Friday morning could we see any traces of him.

As I had come to Sorg on account of the capital fishing to be had in the neighbourhood, I managed to get the owner of the farm at which we were stopping to accompany me next day, in Bjarni's absence.

The Sorg is a large foss or waterfall at the southern end of Thingvalla Lake, which carries

the water into Olavesvatn, the second lake ; thence it flows out in three cascades to the river. It was a four-mile ride from the farm, and as we ascended ridge after ridge of high ground, the scenery was very grand, and soon after, when we struck the river and rode along the banks towards the lake, it became quite magnificent. The water in the stream (which was much flooded) was of a most extraordinary shot-colour, varying from deepest ultramarine to light emerald-green—no brown in it whatever ; in fact it had more the appearance of dye. It rushed along at a pace I never saw equalled before, and with a loud moaning, roaring sound. The banks for many yards on either side were quite unsafe from the undermining action of the current, and so rapidly did the great waves dart past, that stones of immense size, that I pushed in, were carried down a long way before they sank out of sight, for the water was so clear that we could see many feet down into it whenever a shadow crossed the surface. A mile further on we reached the first cascade, tear-

ing wildly over a mass of rocks, roaring and leaping down into the stream below. Beyond this, higher up the valley, we saw the other two, one above the other; and as each waterfall brought its own river, which met the streams of its neighbours in one writhing, seething whirlpool 200 yards below, and as the immense pillars of spray rose from these terrible waters, and united into one vast column of white vapour which hung over the whole panorama, illumined by the hot rays of a midsummer sun, the effect was as magnificent as anything I ever saw in my life.

Another mile's riding and we reached the fall at the head of the smaller lake, and just as we sighted it, the sky suddenly clouded over, and the rain clouds drifted up over the water.

"That's capital," said the farmer, "you will be able to fish to-day."

"What do you mean?"

"Why the sun is gone in, and the flies won't worry us, they are never very bad unless the sun is hot."

"Oh yes," I said, "I have heard that there is a sort of gnat in Iceland which is very troublesome, and some one suggested that I should bring a mosquito veil, but I have seen nothing of them as yet."

"No, because you have not been to the lakes where they are usually found. If you came to this place on a hot day, you would be driven away, and if you went to My-vatn (which signifies Gnat-water) you would have to look out for your horses. Why, a friend of mine had two horses bitten to death."

I felt a little incredulous of the friend's horses, but said nothing.

"Why," the farmer continued, "it is these countless myriads of gnats that make the fishing so good. The fish gorge themselves with them, and you will see for yourself presently, a regular surface of fish on the water waiting for the fly."

This I found was perfectly true, for on nearing the lake the immense masses of closely packed fish on the top of the water near the waterfall was a sight that quite staggered me.

We hobbled the horses, and when I had put up my rod, tried the fish with various kinds of artificial fly, but not one would they take. I suppose they had had enough of the natural ones. We then dug up some worms, and hardly had I let my bait touch the water, before an immense fish sprang upon it. How I wished for my salmon rod, instead of the flimsy trout-tackle I had brought with me. It was impossible to pull it in, and I was forced to let it drag me up and down the bank, over the rocks, into the water, and in fact, do with me just what it pleased for half an hour before I dare take it in hand. Had I had Bjarni I should have had no fear, but my farmer friend became so excited, as he had never seen a fish caught with a rod before, that he could hardly contain himself. When the fish was pulled into the shallows, I managed to explain to him that he must get into the lake, between the monster and the deep water, and do all he could to drive it out.

He cautiously crawled down the bank, waded round to the fish, drove it into a little niche in the

rock, and then falling upon it as if it had been a wild beast, drew his jack-knife, *and cut off its head.*


The fish weighed about ten pounds, which was not bad considering the very slight tackle I had at my command. The whole morning's sport was but a repetition of this manceuvre. Each time I dropped my bait into the water I caught a fish, and each fish cost me a good half hour's struggle ; many were lost. One old fellow I took particular note of, for after swallowing the hook he went off steadily across the lake, slowly and without the least hurry. I knew I had got a giant by his way of taking it, so prepared for the worst. On he went, steadily, my reel at last gave out. The irresistible pull continued—the rod bent double—then I conclude the hook pricked him, for he gave one immense spring, four feet clear above the water, took away all my gut, and broke the top joint of the rod in two places.

This accident of course checked further proceedings for the day, and we slung our fish across

the horses, tying them together with long grass. There were only two of them under six pounds weight. The Icelanders call this fish *silungr*, though what they are I don't know. Their backs are brownish grey, and their bellies like the red gold of a gold fish. The flesh is somewhat similar to salmon, but apt to be dry. They run to a great size, for the monster that broke my rod weighed (I should imagine) at least twenty-five pounds. As for the flies that I had heard so much of, I ceased to trouble about them, as the drizzling rain had effectually kept them off, if indeed they existed at all.

When we reached home again, I found Bjarni with letters and newspapers, and after a capital dinner of fish, laid down on my bed and read and re-read the various assortment of news that had happily reached me.

On Saturday morning, Bjarni and I started off again to the lake when I had mended my rod and made it quite secure. As I had caught so many fish on the previous day, with the indifferent



assistance of my friend the farmer, I imagined that I might do twice as well with the help of the experienced Bjarni.

Off we went in the burning sun, and rode briskly up towards the high grounds, from which we could see the outline of the lake. As we reached the summit of the line of hills overlooking the water, we perceived a sort of mist hanging over the shore.

"Oh, Helveta!" said Bjarni, "the flies are up."

We rode on, and shortly became enveloped in myriads of flies. Every minute they multiplied by thousands, and by the time we had reached the banks of the river, which flows out of the lake, we were almost invisible to one another.

I had just begun to feel hundreds of sharp little stings, when a brisk breeze came off the water and scattered our enemies, and in two minutes we were able to breathe again.

"Bjarni," said I, "if this is the sort of thing I shall go back."

"Oh," said he, "it won't be so bad at the big water ; besides, the sun has gone in."

Well, I listened to the voice of the charmer, and was persuaded to go on.

As it happened, a few clouds came up over the hills, so that when we reached the banks of the lake our enemies were comparatively few. The horses were turned loose to graze, and when the rod was put up, we clambered down the rocks to commence operations.

I had just hooked a fish, when all in a moment the sun burst forth with a perfectly tropical heat upon the mountains, and (I can find no other expression for it) "the devil was unchained ;" what we had experienced half an hour previously was simply laughable to what we now endured ; from the earth, the grass, the rocks, in fact, from everywhere arose a living fog of countless myriads of long winged flies.

Sting, sting, sting, on they came. It was useless to attempt to beat them off. We had our handkerchiefs out in a moment, and tied them

round our heads, leaving a small slit for one eye to see through, and to make matters more secure, I fixed my eye-glass in the exposed eye. We pulled our socks up over our trousers, put the wading boots over the socks, tied string round our sleeves, and attempted to get away.

This was easier said than done, for our poor horses, maddened by the attacks of these voracious creatures, had galloped away, and we dare not peep out of our headdresses for more than half a second at a time to look for them. My broad-brimmed hat was weighed down upon my shoulders by the heaving masses of these insects. Not a spot of the colour of my coat was visible, and had I met my servant suddenly in other circumstances, I should not have known him to be a man. He was one uniform grey from head to foot; the slope of his shoulders being continuous with the sides of his head, he had the appearance of a man wrapped in a living cloak, and as he walked, solid lumps of flies fell from his back on to the ground. To those who have seen bees swarming

it will not be a difficult matter either to picture to themselves the appearance of these conglomerations of insects, or to understand the wretched pickle they involved us in.

I made a desperate attempt to gather my things together, but I simply could not, and, rod in hand, turned and fled up the hillside as hard as I could go for more than a mile. On a crag I sat down and rested, free from my tormentors, and at my ease watched the unhappy Bjarni, a mere speck in the distance, rushing up and down the long valley like a lunatic, in vain efforts to catch the horses.

At last he secured them, and brought them up the hill. They were covered with blood, and much frightened, Murder's white coat showing the sanguinary stains very vividly. His eyes were swollen and full of flies, as were the nostrils of both.

Poor Bjarni! When I told him that I had left my rod-case, straps, fishing-book, &c., on the bank, he was much disconcerted. In the bravest

way, however, he went back and recovered them. I would not have gone on any consideration.

When we got home I discovered that I had been served pretty roughly, for not only had I to change everything, as between each article of clothing was a complete paste of hundreds of smashed flies (a natural blister in fact), but my face, neck, and wrists were swollen dreadfully, and covered with bites, and my right arm was one fierce rash from the shoulder downwards.

It was rather a startling incident this, for an innocent stranger, and I don't think that there is any remarkable probability of my visiting these "romantic waters" on the next fine sunshiny day.

SIXTH WEEK.

Sunday, July 14th.

As the haymaking season had just commenced, the whole household devoted themselves on Sunday to the mending of rakes, scythes, &c., &c., so as to be able to begin mowing on Monday morning.

Grain of any sort is never grown in Iceland and as the winter is invariably most severe, the hay harvest is a thing of even greater importance in that country than with us.

Hay is seldom or never given to the horses even in the most severe seasons, being entirely reserved for the cows. The miserable horses have to pick up a precarious living from the withered couch which still clings to the hillsides after the summer has gone by, and in severe weather are often found dead from starvation. The hayfield is always mown every year, and no beasts of any

kind are ever allowed to graze in it, even when the crop is cut. A little manure is spread over it in the spring, and the rest left to nature.

This is always the one enclosed field on a farm, and is invariably situated close to the house, surrounded by a low turf wall enclosing from one to eight acres. No greater sacrilege can be committed in Iceland than to ride through the precious mowing grass and allow your horse to eat.

I mended a rake or two, and made myself generally useful, and on the following morning, after completing a sketch, commenced work in the hayfield, and (I think) was of some service, as the farmer expressed himself greatly delighted.

On Tuesday we took our leave, and set out for Thingvalla, one of the most interesting places in the whole island. Our ride was lovely, as the scenery and the weather were alike good. For more than ten miles we rode by the side of the Thingvalla lake, and enjoyed it thoroughly. The blue mountains, the green water, and the old grey lava rocks covered with deep moss, were very

beautiful. The moss indeed, looked so inviting, that we lay down upon it and slept in the laziest way for three hours before we resumed our journey, and as the horses smelt the dwarf birches, which grow in great profusion in this region, we had great difficulty in recovering them, as they wandered a long distance in search of the green food.

About five o'clock in the afternoon we reached Thingvalla, and on riding up to the Church (the traveller's usual resting place), I discovered two French naval officers dining. They had come from Reykjavik that morning on a shooting expedition, and intended to return the same evening.

I attempted to address them in their own language, but they laughed at me to such an extent that I was forced to desist for a time. All in a moment it flashed across me that I had been mixing up French and Icelandic in the most barbarous way, and it was really a great effort to make myself understood, as whenever I became voluble, I was sure to bring in a lot of native words quite unintelligible to them.

They were exceedingly kind, for when they discovered how badly I had lived for the past few weeks they gave me bread, butter, some excellent preserve, and a bottle of red wine.

They had scarcely mounted their ponies to return to Reykjavik, when I saw another cavalcade rapidly approaching, and two minutes later some English acquaintances rode into the churchyard.

I was much delighted to have a comfortable chat with them, and we sat in the little church and eat fish and black bread, and laughed at each other's adventures. We had a discussion I recollect, about "skier," a sort of curdled milk, eaten either with cream or fresh milk, which forms a staple article of diet in the country.

We all disagreed as to how the "skier" was made. One said it was turned with rennet, another said it was scalded, &c., until X—— calmly observed, "Well! I asked a widow woman at Sitha how she made it, and her receipt was not remarkably complicated."

“Why, what did she say?”

“Oh, as well as I could understand, she said that she put the fresh milk into a skin-bag, and hung it up in the sun.”

“And what then?”

“What then?” *Why, when it smelt strong enough they called it ‘skier.’*”

I think he must have misunderstood his hostess, or else she had more humour than is common to the generality of the natives.

When we had finished chatting, my friends, being tired, went to sleep, and I wandered out across the hill. At a cottage, a mile or so away, that I passed during my evening’s ramble I was asked to come and see some foxes, and was taken to the crater of a small extinct volcano, and on looking in saw five young black foxes.

“I caught them in the mountain,” the owner said, “when they were quite small, and put them in here, and when they grow big enough I shall kill them for their skins.”

Afterwards I went in to have some coffee with

him, as it is almost an insult to refuse an Ice-lander's hospitality, which is sure to be energetically offered on every available opportunity. He told me I was very wasteful, because I put the sugar-candy into the coffee-cup instead of holding it between my teeth whilst I drank. "Why," said he, "I can make a tiny bit do for two or three cups of coffee."

We afterwards went up-stairs to a sort of small loft, where his mother was working at a loom, as he wished me to acquaint him with some of the modern improvements in cloth-making. Of course I knew nothing about it, as I did not even understand the working of the primitive machine before me, and to the farmer's great disappointment could tell him nothing.

Almost all the huts, even the very poorest, possess a loom, on which one or other member of the family is invariably at work, so as to make a sufficient supply of clothes, both for home use and for barter.

It seems so strange that such universal know-

ledge should be attributed to any stranger by these primitive people. All over the country I was asked questions upon political economy, the condition of Denmark, the best way of bridging the river Thjorsá, and all varieties of engineering. I was asked to translate Latin and Greek, and requested to give my opinion upon a young man's translation of some English verses. I was asked if I knew the Queen and had spoken with her, and on replying in the negative, was asked why I had *not been to visit her*. I was asked questions upon fish-curing, upon law-making, and upon currency, and the night I sailed for England was desired to give my opinion upon a woman of disordered intellect, and upon my declaring her to be insane, was requested to take her with me to Edinburgh and put her into the hospital (?), "*as every one knew that they admitted mad people into that establishment free of charge.*"

As it frequently happened that I was in a state of complete ignorance upon the subject under conversation, and was unable to give satis-

factory answers, I was often looked upon as a delusion and a snare, nay, sometimes the natives seemed to feel quite injured that they had come a mile or so to see a stranger from the outer world, who could not tell them everything connected with every subject.

However, on this occasion, though unable to help my friend with his loom, I gave him some valuable information about his garden, where he grew a few dejected potatoes and turnips. I trust that he will in future have a better crop.

We then shook hands, and I went back to Thingvalla to bed. On Wednesday morning we all had a delightful bath in the Axerá (axe-water)—so called because one of the old heroes lost his axe therein—and afterwards inspected the site of the old Parliament, and the places where the various criminals were executed in the early days of Iceland.

Now as Thingvalla was one of the places that I had especially come from England to see, and as it was the rendezvous of all the characters con-

nected with the Njála, I shall endeavour to give a little description of it, if I can.

At the northern end of Thingvalla Lake, and running in the same direction, is a high precipice of lava rock some miles in length. Parallel with this precipice is a gigantic natural wall, once evidently part of the rock, but now separated from it by a chasm from twenty to forty feet wide. At the bottom of this chasm is a sort of road for a short distance, which turns sharply up over the face of the cliff. The regularity of the gigantic precipice and towering wall is marvellous, as they continue to run on side by side for several miles. At one point in the cliff the river Axerá dashes over into the chasm, and flows out lower down, through a rent in the wall. In this lower waterfall women convicted of child murder were drowned in sacks.

This chasm, "The Almannagiá," or "All Men's Rift," is the one great natural feature, constantly mentioned in the Saga.

When the Axerá has flown out from the wall, it reaches the little plain, and after cutting many



ALMANNAGIA.

[To face page 170.]



small channels through the green sod, and forming several little islands, disappears in the lake.

It was on the banks of the river that the booths were erected for the powerful chiefs who came to attend the Parliament, and it was upon the large island in the middle of the stream that all mortal quarrels were settled by the law of the sword in the presence of thousands of spectators. The island I have seen with my own eyes, and some few remnants of the booths are standing unto this day.

On the side of the river opposite the Almanagía is another vast lava bed, though, unlike its neighbour, its face is not precipitous, but easy of ascent. This lava bed is honeycombed with apparently bottomless fissures in the rock partly filled with water. Round one of the highest points of the lava three of the fissures meet, and form a triangular island perfectly inaccessible excepting for a large boulder or two at the apex of the triangle, which have stuck in the mouth of the narrowest fissure and bridged it over.

A better natural fortress could not exist. The

whole appearance too, is very deceptive, for I had no idea that between me and the higher ground there was a "great gulf fixed." I walked up to it, and was stopped by a yawning fissure. I looked carefully over the edge, and found the sides leant towards one another, the rent being smaller at the top than the bottom. It seemed about twenty feet across, but of the depth I could form no opinion, as about twenty feet down I saw the surface of the deep black water. Ugh! what a horrible place it was!!!

I then tried to gain the little rock by going round the other side, but in every place was met by a "bottomless pit." At last the guide showed me the secret, and we stepped across on to the "Lögbërg," or "Law-hill."

Here, for hundreds of years, an open-air assembly of chiefs and ecclesiastics met at certain seasons of the year and issued laws to the people, judgments upon their disputes, and punishments upon their crimes. From this unassailable rock they issued their stern decrees, which were imme-

diately carried out beneath their eyes. Across that stone yonder the murderers' backs were broken, down further the slope the witches and necromancers were burnt, and on the duel-island, year after year, were petty jealousies and misunderstandings fought out to the death under the stern decisions of the doomsters. It was too, at an assembly of the Parliament on this spot that Christianity was first introduced into Iceland.

It is almost impossible to give any idea of the feelings of deep interest with which I regarded every inch of this romantic spot, and tried to imagine what an appearance it must have presented 900 years ago. I wondered where Hallgerda's booth was. I know that it was just down by the water that Gunnar first saw her sitting in the doorway. Njál's booth too, was some two or three hundred yards down the river on the other side. It was here that the desperate battle took place between Njál's assassins and his avengers, and it was between the water and the lava that so many of them were killed.

It was a foolish feeling, perhaps, but it was an inexpressible satisfaction to me to sit on the judgment-seat where the old lawgivers had sat so long ago, to stand on the island where Gunnar fought and won his duels, and to bathe in water where the old hero lost his axe. I came, saw, and was grateful.

In the evening my English friends left me and rode away to Reykjavik, and I made a small sketch of the Almannagiá, and worked upon it until nearly twelve o'clock at night.

On Thursday we rode away to Mosfell, but did not take the direct road, as I wished to see several objects of interest which lay some miles out of the track. We were very much disappointed, therefore, when we reached Mosfell after five hours hard riding, to find that the owner was absent, and that we could gain no admittance. There was no help for it, so we turned our horses' heads and rode back for about eight miles to a house we had passed earlier in the day, where we received a pleasant welcome.

On Friday I spent my last day "in the saddle," and a very very happy one it was. We rode towards Reykjavik, and on our way passed several inviting trout streams. At the first river I took about a dozen small fish, at the second, eight large ones, and at the last, three monsters. I should have taken more, but the last big fish broke my rod again, and not only that, he dragged me along the slippery lava some distance, and gave me two severe falls, cutting my knees and shins badly.

When we had remounted we galloped down the bank at a good pace, putting to flight a lot of wild ducks and geese. They were so plentiful, that I felt much annoyed I had no gun. Some little distance further on another large flock arose and fled up stream, one only going down the river. I pulled up "Battle" sharply, slipped off, and picking up a pebble, threw it at the duck, and by an extraordinary accident cut its head right off, though it was more than twenty yards distant.

How Bjarni laughed at me, and very truly

observed, "You may live to be a hundred, but you can never do that again."

A minute later an old man appeared on the bank overlooking the water, and asked me if I had had any sport. "Because," said he, "I should be very grateful if you would give me a few fish, as it is the only food I can get, and you have had a great deal of enjoyment out of my little river."

"You shall have some fish, of course," I said, but while speaking I had been handling the headless bird, and found it very old and hard; "but wouldn't you like a wild duck better?"

"Oh, by all means," exclaimed the arch impostor, eagerly holding out his hands. I threw the venerable bird across the stream, and rode away. The fact was, the man was very well fed, and the river was no more his than mine; as he tried a little *ruse* on me, I gave him something that could be of no use whatever to either of us.

When we reached Reykjavik the first person I saw was J——, standing at the door of a house.

“Why,” said I, “where did you come from?”

“Oh, we left here the same day you did, six weeks back, and we returned a quarter of an hour ago.”

On Saturday I sold my horses, and got very fair prices for them, and engaged a berth on board the little trader which was to sail for Leith on the Monday.

Bjarni had business in the country, so could not stop to see me off; he came to bid me farewell about five o'clock on Sunday morning.

Monday night, after the hearty good wishes of my native friends, I left for Scotland, and reached Edinburgh on Saturday evening, 27th July, 1872.

THE END.

1

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